WORMS, WORMS, EVERYWHERE, AND NOT A ONE TO SEE: THE CONNOTATIVE ROLE OF WORMS IN SHAKESPEARE'S CANON

by

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Abstract

The study of animals in Shakespeare's collected works has expanded over the last 30 years. While a number of different animals have been discussed, the importance of the worm in the larger scope of the canon has largely been ignored. By focusing on the perception and presentation of worms in relation to cultural ideas of death, corruption, and consumption, ideas surrounding the body and soul are brought to the forefront. Worms are integral to our understanding of the Early Modern cultural constructs of the body and soul as the presence of worms reveals the state of the individual or the broader environment. Overall, the depiction of worms in Shakespeare's works serves as a way to understand the metaphysical processes surrounding death and corruption.

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Introduction

"For Worms"

A number of animals, beasts, and insects walk, fly, swim, and creep through Shakespeare's canon. As summarized by Karen Raber, discussion about the presence of animals in Shakespeare's plays has a relatively long history that has evolved from lists of birds to more traditional academic research on a wide range of animals.[1] The importance of each animal that has been studied should not be questioned. However, in this thesis I would like to pay particular attention to a smaller animal: the worm. Although worms appear in a number of Shakespeare's plays and a handful of his poems, to date research about the importance of worms has been relatively scarce. With 62 references in the plays and nine in the poems, the representation of worms in Shakespeare's canon is on par with other, more extensively studied animals. While being nowhere near horses (295) or dogs (192), the number of worm references is similar to or exceeds those of birds (98) and sheep (44). There is therefore a significant body of evidence from which to study worms and help expand their place in the growing amount of research on the importance of animals in Shakespeare's works.

I do admit that the relationship between worms and the canon is perhaps less visually appealing than bears chasing actors or horses abandoning kings, but worms do play an important role in exploring various significant cultural questions. In general, animal studies focusing on the Early Modern Period examine the relationship between humans and animals in order to explore the idea of the human and what makes a human a human. In *Perceiving Animals,* Erica Fudge notes how her general study of animals in the Early Modern Period is "not so much about animals as about the ways in which humans define themselves as human in the face of the animal" (1). In a similar way, other studies specifically focusing on animals

in Shakespeare's works are also concerned with human identity: "Most of Shakespeare's animal references are devoted to the use of animals to express aspects of human identity, a role animals played throughout the middle ages, and which also featured prominently in classical texts dear to early modern readers" (Raber, "Shakespeare and Animal Studies" 289). The importance of the relationship between humans and animals extends to scholarship about worms as the two frequently interact with one another throughout a human's life. As will be discussed in the following chapters, not only are worms present once someone has died, but worms can also consume and entwine with people while they are still alive. In general, people may have wanted to avoid any connection between themselves and worms, but such a separation is not sustainable as eventually everyone ends up being with worms, if not while they are alive, then certainly once they have died. While the association between worms and people is a constant reality, rather than entirely focusing on what makes humans human, I will discuss how worms serve as a way to understand the metaphysical world. The change in focus arises in order to better examine the worm as a worm, or at least as close as we can get, while still being influenced by our human bias. By focusing on the worm more than the human, the aim is to examine the tension that arises when worm and human interact. The focus is not about what makes a human a human but rather how the role of the worm in the metaphysical world challenges and disrupts societal constructs.

Recently, there have been four academic works that analyze worms in relation to Shakespeare's plays. As far as I am aware, to date there is no research on how Shakespeare portrays worms in his poems. The first paper to look at worms critically is Ian MacInnes' "The Politic Worm: Invertebrate Life in the Early Modern English Body." In this article, MacInnes discusses Early Modern zoological ideas of worms and finds that worms elicit mixed emotions. On one hand, people were fascinated with worms due to their perceived

ability to spontaneously generate, but worms were also feared for their ability to destroy something internally without any external warning. MacInnes argues that these zoological views allow the worms depicted in *Hamlet* to be read as a metonymy for politics, thereby establishing a "crisis of conscience and political action" (268) in the play. Through the presence of worms, corruption is shown to be a natural part of life. In seeming reaction to MacInnes, Amanda Bailey in "*Hamlet* without Sex: The Politics of Regenerate Loss" focuses on political regeneration over MacInnes' thesis of political corruption and degradation. Bailey's discussion is formulated on Early Modern ideas of worm sexual reproduction. She argues that ideas of regeneration allow Hamlet to view people and the larger political system within the contemporary context of an aging Elizabeth I as being in a constant state of renewal. MacInnes' and Bailey's articles therefore provide diametrically opposed political discussions about worms while showing how contemporary context influences the ideas associated with them. In her chapter "Mutual Consumption: The Animal Within" from *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture*, Karen Raber also discusses how Early Modern understanding of worms highlights certain themes in *Hamlet*. However, rather than discussing politics, Raber examines how humans and animals were linked in the constant cycle of consumption of one another: humans eat animals and animals eat humans. Raber connects this idea to the crisis of human identity in *Hamlet* as the distinction between humans and animals has been blurred due to this cycle. The final modern source is Randall Martin's *Shakespeare and Ecology*. In his chapter, "'I wish you joy of the worm': Evolutionary ecology in *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," Martin analyses how Hamlet and Cleopatra invoke worms to examine "evolutionary attitudes towards animal-human relations" (139), suggesting that both Hamlet and Cleopatra find rejuvenation through their connection to the natural food webs and cycles through decomposition. Martin then extends his analysis to

highlight the interdependency between people and worms to show the need for cooperation between social and political organizations in order for modern-day readers to cope with our own environmental crisis. Throughout all of these sources, ideas of corruption, consumption, and renewal are important and serve as avenues to understand how the world functions.

In this thesis I expand research about worms beyond the specific in-depth analysis of one or two plays which has dominated modern discussion of Shakespeare's worms. Rather I focus on all of the worm references as a whole in order to investigate major connotations that are found throughout the canon. My research revolves around ideas of death, corruption, and consumption in order to explore the relationship between worms and the larger cultural concepts of the body and the soul. While these threads are not new areas of study, my research shifts away from specific consequences of these ideas for particular plays and looks at the implication of the relationship between worms and the natural world in a more general way. This analysis will lead us through a number of the plays and a handful of the sonnets but will leave many plays and two of Shakespeare's narrative poems untouched. These exclusions are not to say that such lines are not valuable and worthy of their own research but for the sake of space and scope some worms had to be left behind for the time being.

Today the term 'worm' encompasses a wide range of animals. The *OED* provides definitions that include members of the *Lumbricus* genus ("worm, n." I.3.a); the larva of insects such as maggots, grubs, and, caterpillars (I.5.a); the larva of particular destructive beetles (I.5.b); and "various long slender crustaceans and molluscs" (I.9). Although this list includes specific categories of animals, the *OED* also suggests that 'worm' includes "any annelid, terrestrial, aquatic, or marine" (I.3.a). Such definitions broaden the definition of worm beyond just an earthworm to many limbless and slender creatures. While the modern definition of worm includes a broad range of animals, historically the term 'worm' included

"[a]ny animal that creeps or crawls" (2.a) such as earthworms, maggots, and caterpillars but it also may include other insects and reptiles. For example, the *Aberdeen Bestiary*, written around 1200, includes spiders, millipedes, scorpions, and termites in its section about worms (Folio 72r-v). In addition to these creatures, 'worm' included snakes, serpents, and dragons (*OED*, "worm, n." I.1). While the *Aberdeen Bestiary* insists that "[t]he worm does not crawl like a snake, with visible steps or by the pressure of its scales, because it lacks the firm spine which you find in snakes…" (Folio 72V), thereby excluding snakes from the definition of worm, during the Early Modern Period 'worm' and 'snake' could replace one another: "This association between worms and snakes was common in the early modern period, when authors frequently used the terms 'worm' and 'snake' interchangeably, or described worms as 'viperous', venomous or serpentlike" (Skuse 71). Shakespeare clearly places snakes into the same category as worms since he often uses 'worm' rather than 'snake.' He also describes a worm as being venomous, as in *Timon of Athens*, where he refers to "The gilded newt and eyeless venomed worm" (4.3.183), and in *Macbeth* where he writes "The worm that's fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed…" (3.4.28-29). For my purposes, I will be using the term 'worm' in its historical sense, which includes snakes when relevant. In general I do not specify the type of worm being referred to except in the case of snakes when the change in terminology affects the meaning of the text being discussed. These implications will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One. I am using the broad definition of worm to reflect the use of the term in the Early Modern Period and examine the range of connotations associated with the term 'worm' rather than just one animal.

Guiding my research are concepts from New Historicism and Animal Studies. Based in New Historicism, the idea that the individual is influenced by their own context is significant for my analysis. Texts should not be perceived as being closed off from the

context around them. Instead they should be understood in relation to the culture and society that they are produced in. As a result of this interconnection we have "to imagine that the writers we love did not spring up from nowhere and that their achievements must draw upon a whole life-world and that this life-world has undoubtedly left other traces of itself" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 12-13). Intertextuality between works is highlighted through this interconnection as the writer's ideas are not separate from contemporary contexts. Since the writer is influenced by ideas from the society around them, we are able to find connections between different authors who are drawing from the same context. Therefore, there is a sharing of ideas that can be traced between works written throughout a given period. Through this idea I am able to trace the interconnection between different sources that discuss or represent worms regardless of the larger relationship between these works. Texts do not need to cite one another in order for a connection to be established between them as both are drawing on and are influenced by the same context. For my purposes, this does not mean that the texts need to argue, present, or even focus on worms in the same manner; rather, by looking at a multitude of texts and how worms are discussed or even barely mentioned, I am able to expand our knowledge of the presentation and understanding of worms during the Early Modern Period.

In addition to invoking New Historicists concepts of intertextuality, my research is influenced by Animal Studies' discussions of how humans define animals. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida discusses the relationship between animals and people. He suggests that when we observe the animal, or "animot" as he prefers, we are presented with an 'other' that we not only observe but that also observes us. Derrida suggests that we are able to find ourselves in the animal since when people talk about themselves they do so through an 'other.' This projection occurs as we are unable to fully understand an 'other' and

what the ‘other’ thinks and how they perceive the world. The interpretation people provide of the ‘other’ is actually more telling of themselves as they interpret the ‘other’ through their own context. Therefore, through the interpretation of the ‘animal other’ we are able to examine the idea of being human (Derrida 12). Since humans define themselves at least partly through human-animal interactions, we are able to learn more about humans and how they view the world through their definitions and presentations of animals.

In “Viewing Animals” Erica Fudge combines the importance of individual context and defining ourselves through the animal. Fudge argues that the observations that we make about animals, or the analysis of previous observations, is continually being shaped by the observer’s world view. She demonstrates that when we observe human-animal relationships we need to be aware of our own context, and, if we are studying the past, the context of those previous interactions. We can accomplish this contextualization by thinking about when, where, and how the contact occurred and by considering a list of ideas about human-animal relations:

1. There can be no appeals to nature as the sole origin of the energies of the human observation, classification and representation of the natural world.
2. There can be no motiveless creation in the human observation, classification and representation of the natural world.
3. There can be no transcendent or timeless or unchanging observation, classification or representation of the natural world.
4. There can be no autonomous artifacts: all observations, classifications and representations are embedded in wider historical, social, intellectual and cultural structures.

5. There can be no observation, classification, or representation of the natural world without an origin and an object, a from and a for.

6. There can be no human observation, classification and representation of the natural world without social energy.

7. There can be no spontaneous generation of social energy. (Fudge, "Viewing Animals" 163)

Overall, Fudge's seven stipulations suggest that the construction of nature and our representation of it are continually in flux because people's perceptions are constantly changing. How people view the world is influenced by one's personal experiences and context. As there is no one static human viewpoint of the world, the representation of nature changes over time and context and between people. Additionally, the presentation is always driven by a previous representation. No construction is spontaneously generated, but is based on a pre-existing idea. By considering the ideas of New Historicism and Animal Studies together it is apparent that how the animal, or the worm, is presented is based upon how a person perceives the animal at that time and is influenced by the person's cultural context. Additionally, the presentation of the animal is not solely about the animal but also tells us about the person and how they define themselves. Therefore, the depiction of worms not only shows us how contemporary context influences the representation of animals but also how it displays ideas about human identity and social constructs. For my thesis, I will focus on ideas relating to the corruptibility of the body and the soul and the effect of this corruptibility on salvation.

In addition to studying worm references in Shakespeare's canon, I will be relying on a variety of contemporary sources to provide contextual information about worms. Edward Topsel's bestiaries *The Historie of Four-footed Beasts*, *The Historie of Serpents*, and the later

conglomeration, *The History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents,* provide broad ideas and assumptions about worms and related animals such as snakes. Such ideas and assumptions provide a cultural background within which to place and analyze Shakespeare's references. Additional contextual information about worms comes from a range of other contemporary sources such as artwork, *The Holy Bible*, and religious sermons. The inclusion of artwork and religious texts is important for my analysis as these sources provide links between worms and larger cultural ideas surrounding death, including the eventual fate of bodies and souls. In pieces of artwork and religious texts, the body and soul are the main focus with worms being additional elements to these contemporary discussions. By including both works focused on worms, such as Topsel's bestiaries, and works focused on various aspects of contemporary culture, I can bring the two focuses together and see how the different ideas compliment and influence one another.

Chapter Breakdown

My thesis will be broken into three chapters and will look at the relationship between worms and the body and or the soul in each one. In Chapter One, I will discuss the representation of the problematic relationship between worms and death. While worms are a common element in the contemporary representation of death, their inclusion in references to a character's death proves problematic. While death was supposed to allow the soul to separate from the body and the deceased to become closer to God, worms suggest death is more destructive than useful. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio's death provides a starting point to discuss the meaninglessness of death as he dies without purpose. He is simply another casualty in the ongoing feud that consumes and destroys Verona. In my analysis of *Hamlet*, I will discuss how identity is removed through physical decomposition, causing the ownership of the body to move further away from God and closer to worms. The problem with worms

taking over the body is that worms become the prime beneficiary in someone's death. *Richard II* explores the idea of interrupted inheritance. Rather than passing along the body politic to the next King, Richard II can only leave his body to the Earth. This interruption proves problematic as the culturally constructed immortality of the body politic is disrupted. Finally, Sonnets 6, 71, 74, and 146 all build upon the idea of inheritance. As worms are the main inheritors of human bodies, they again challenge naturalized processes of succession. However, in this instance the ability of the soul to escape from the body is questioned. Altogether, becoming worm food proves problematic as metaphysical processes of succession are interrupted.

In Chapter Two, I shift my focus from the dead body to the living soul. Invoking the concept of the "worm of conscience," I will discuss the corruptibility of the human soul. Due to the connection between corruption and worms eating at one's conscience from within, worms prove to be the perfect vehicle to metaphorically gnaw at the sinner's soul. The purpose of the worm of conscience is to help the soul control bodily passions and allow the person to live a pious life. When these reminders go unheeded destruction occurs. The worm may only corrupt their individual host, as in the case of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*, but corruption may also extend to the larger world. Through discussions of *Timon of Athens*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III*, I will examine the relationship between the corrupted state and the corrupted individual. In Athens it is the actions of certain citizens that prove toxic and cause the Earth to birth worms and other abhorred creatures. The world of *Macbeth* and *Richard III* proves to be just as corrupt and hospitable for worms. However, in both of these plays the state has been corrupted by the actions of the monarch. In all instances, the presence of the worm either in the individual or the state highlights that there is a disease that must be cured or else the corruption will continue to spread.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I will combine discussion of body and soul and look at the potential beneficial relationship between humans and worms. As discussed in Edward Topsel's *Historie of Serpents*, earthworms had many different purposes in the Early Modern Period and were useful in helping humans traverse and understand the natural world. For Romeo, Cleopatra, and Constance worms prove useful at the time of death. In a contrast to Chapter One where the destructive nature of worms and death is highlighted, for these three characters, worms and death offer a chance for renewal and or escape. Death and worms become desirable rather than detestable. However, each character perceives worms and the hope they offer differently. For Romeo, worms serve as a symbol that he has achieved his goal of reuniting with Juliet in death. Romeo's reference to worms is part of his general acceptance of death which is shaped by his hopeful and positive presentation of Juliet and her death. Cleopatra uses a worm as a means to achieve her goal of dying and escaping Caesar; however, the destructive and levelling qualities of worms prove problematic as they call into question whether Cleopatra will be able to achieve the reward for her escape. Cleopatra's interaction with a worm, in this case an asp, is comparable to Eve's interaction with the serpent in Genesis as both Cleopatra and Eve introduce death and corruption into their lives as a direct result of their interaction with a worm. Finally, in *King John*, Constance invokes worms as part of her desire to stay with death. Due to her excessive grief for the loss of her son Arthur, Constance fixates on the fate of the physical body. As a result, she cannot escape the unnatural combination of death and life that she finds on Earth and in Heaven. In these plays, worms are shown to be useful when they help the characters escape the torments of the living world and the worm's inclusion challenges the importance of the reunification of body and soul for a person to achieve salvation.

Altogether, worms figuratively act as the intermediary between the body and the soul. Once someone has died the physical worm cares for the corpse. While a person is still living, the worm of conscience cares for the righteousness of the human soul. The worm thus acts as the vehicle to divide the soul and the body but it also represents the ability of the two to come back together. The relationship between the body and the soul and the corruption that occurs within shows whether or not the person or the state will eventually achieve the desired outcome of being purified, and in the case of the individual, saved. If at any point the worm destroys the body or the soul, the reconciliation between the two dissolves. Worms thus serve as a means to understand the metaphysical processes surrounding death and corruption. They act as vehicles to tell us when the world is operating incorrectly and needs to be healed. Worms may prove harmful or helpful depending on the perspective of the individual and what the presence of worms signifies.

Chapter One

"Thou Art Dust and Food For:" Death

In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between the dead body and worms. As figurative caregivers, worms are temporary guardians of the human body until Resurrection and the eventual reunion between the body and the soul. While death could be perceived as beneficial, when worms are involved, ideas of destruction and interruption of metaphysical processes are brought to the foreground. Such ideas become problematic as they shift the focus of death from a way for the soul to escape the natural world and its temptations towards the destruction death causes. For my analysis of Shakespeare's representation of worms and death, I begin with Mercutio's death in *Romeo and Juliet* in order to examine the idea of an interrupted death and what happens when someone has no time to prepare for their death. Next, I examine Hamlet and the Clown's discussion of bodily decomposition in *Hamlet*. Through their conversation about Yorick's skull, Hamlet and the Clown demonstrate that no one, regardless of status, is able to escape worms and death's overall destruction of the body. Third, I will briefly touch on Richard II's presentation of succession in 3.2 of *Richard II*. Through his focus on graves, worms, and epitaphs, Richard II highlights the inability of humans to leave anything behind for their successors. Finally, I will analyze the idea of interrupted inheritance in relation to worms found throughout Sonnets 6, 71, 74, and 146. In these sonnets, worms often interrupt the reunification of body and soul and thereby interrupt salvation. Overall, in this chapter I will discuss how worms represent the fear that death happens without meaning, and that there is thus no purpose to life itself. Worms are therefore instrumental in highlighting death's destructive nature including the interruption of metaphysical processes.

Shakespeare and Worms

In his works, Shakespeare represents worms in relation to death in a number of ways. First, worms are invoked in connection to dying even if dying is not the main focus. In *As You Like It,* Rosalind notes that "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (4.1.99-101).[2] In this instance, worms are brought up to say that people die but they do not die just because of love. Rosalind comments on the idea of overzealous love and thereby tells Orlando that tales about people dying for love are lies, and that he will not die if his love is not requited. Rosalind references worms in relation to the body; however her main focus is not to discuss the implications of being eaten by worms. *Pericles* also mentions worms in relation to death and the body: "Ay, she quickly pooped him, she made him roast / meat for worms…" (16.22-23). This line comes in the midst of a conversation between Pander, Bawd, and Boult at their brothel. In this line they are mentioning how one of the prostitutes killed a customer when she deceived or 'pooped him.'[3] The reference to worms is simply to tell the audience, and the other characters, that the customer is dead and is now worm food. The line does highlight the connection between dying and becoming worm food, but its main purpose is to provide information about the brothel and not to discuss the concept of dying. While both of these examples do not provide information about theoretical ideas of dying, they demonstrate the conventional connections made between worms and the act of dying.

In a similar way there are also instances where Shakespeare relates worms to dying; but rather than being an afterthought, the concept of dying is the main purpose. It is important to note that in the following lines, and the majority of Shakespeare's worm lines except for those in *Antony and Cleopatra*, there is no evidence that an actual worm would be

on stage. Rather than the characters actually facing a worm and being scared that it will kill them right now, the characters are scared about what the worm represents: the character's eventual death. For instance, in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia is distraught thinking that Demetrius has killed Lysander: "And hast thou kill'd him sleeping? O brave touch! / Could not a worm, an adder, do so much?" (3.2.70-71). She is not scared of an actual worm, unless we count Demetrius as one; rather she simply fears that Lysander has been killed. In this instance, her invocation of a worm highlights the ability of a worm to kill someone. This particular reference to a worm is different from the others mentioned previously as Hermia is not only making the connection between worms and death, but she is also suggesting that worms can actually kill people. In this situation the worm is not only associated with death, but is the agent of death.[4]

Serpent, Snake, and Worm

Before continuing further I must address the type of worm Hermia is referring to. In the line Hermia makes an interjection clarifying that the worm is an adder. As mentioned in the Introduction, the terms worm, snake, and serpent were interconnected terms used interchangeably or in relation to one another. However, it is important to note when each term is used because of the different connotations associated with each one. One of the main connotations associated with the terms 'snake' and 'serpent' is treachery or treacherousness. In the *OED*, there are a few different definitions that highlight the connection between snakes, serpents, and treachery. For "snake," the term can be used "[w]ith reference to the ingratitude or treachery displayed by the snake in Æsop's fable (1. x)" ("snake, n." 2.a). One of the definitions for serpent is similar, as serpent "[i]n proverbial and allusive phrases [refers] to the serpent's guile, treachery, or malignancy" ("serpent, n." 1.d). Treachery is also

extended and highlighted in people who are referred to as serpents: “A treacherous, deceitful, or malicious person” (“serpent, n.” 3.b). The theme of treachery is present in Shakespeare too. For each of the previous definitions, the *OED* provides a Shakespeare line as an example. Additionally, in his informal Shakespeare language dictionary, N.F. Blake defines a male character being called a serpent as behaving in a “treacherous” manner (135) and something ‘serpent-like’ as acting “treacherously” (217).

The connection between serpents and treachery originates in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, in relation to the serpent’s role in the Fall of Humanity. In Chapter Three, the serpent is introduced as being the “most fubtil then any beaft of the field” (3:1) highlighting its deceptive nature. Later, when God questions Eve about eating from the Tree of Knowledge she defends herself, saying “the Serpent beguiled me” (3:13). While Eve may have eaten the forbidden fruit, it was the serpent who persuaded her to do so. Without the serpent’s involvement the Fall may not have happened. The Bible’s presentation of the serpent’s deceiving nature establishes a pattern of distrust between humans and serpents. In his bestiary *The Historie of Serpents*, Edward Topsel notes the contemporary debate about the original creation of serpents. Some people state serpents are too evil to be part of God’s plan, while others believe that they are part of the evil that must exist in order for good to be present in the world (1). Regardless of one’s stance, both sides agree that serpents are evil. Additionally, other than medicinal uses, in the general introduction to his *Historie of Serpents*, Topsel does not note any benefit or useful aspect of serpents (1-50). This presentation of serpents is different from Topsel’s presentation of earthworms where he notes how they can be used in many different ways to help people.[5] Additionally, serpents are not presented as being bad or harmful, but instead are intrinsically evil. They do not bite people

as a part of their role in nature; rather it is the product of their "mifchevious evil" (42). Serpents are feared because of their personified personality traits. This idea is then extended to people who are compared to serpents because of their treacherous actions.

In *Hamlet*, there is an example of Shakespeare associating treachery with serpents. When Hamlet's Father's Ghost is telling Hamlet about his murder, he describes Claudius, his murderer, as a serpent:

> Now, Hamlet, hear.
> 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
> A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
> Is by a forgèd process of my death
> Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
> The serpent that did sting thy father's life
> Now wears his crown. (*Ham.* 1.5.34-40)

Objectively, the terms serpent and worm could be switched. Why then is 'serpent' used in certain instances and 'worm' in other ones? In these lines there is a difference between the serpent that kills someone and the worm that kills someone. By reconsidering Hermia's line when she questions whether a worm could have killed Lysander, the distinction between serpent and worm is apparent. After inquiring about the worm, Hermia draws on the treachery of a serpent: "An adder did it, for with doubler tongue / Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung" (*MND*. 3.2.72-73). Once Hermia switches her diction to specify serpents and adders she begins to question Demetrius's intentions. Hermia is accusing Demetrius of killing Lysander so that Hermia will shift her love to Demetrius. In a similar way, by describing Claudius as a serpent, the Ghost highlights Claudius's malicious actions of murder

and usurpation. The threat Claudius and Demetrius each represents is different from the 'threat' of a worm killing someone as the serpent is feared for being a serpent; its nature is feared. To use the term 'serpent' would invoke ideas of evil and maliciousness in contrast to ideas of death and decomposition which are often associated with worms. Due to the change in meaning of these terms, my use of worm, snake, or serpent follows the usage of the primary source being discussed. For general usage I use worm, as my main focus is on the ideas associated with worms and not snakes or serpents.

Worms and Death

Returning to ideas associated with worms, in addition to evoking fear about killing people, worms elicit lamentation over someone's actually being dead. For instance, in *Richard III*, Queen Elizabeth weeps that her sons have been made "prey for worms" (4.4.317), and in *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio exclaims that as a result of his duel with Tybalt, "They have made worms' meat of me" (3.1.107). In both cases the characters express disdain about a death and in each instance they focus on the problem of the dead becoming worm food. In these lines, Shakespeare connects worms to the reality that worms decompose dead bodies. With these lines there is a shift from worms causing death to worms attending to the body. Queen Elizabeth and Mercutio do not fear dying; rather, they fear what happens after death. This situation is similar to an idea expressed by Francis Bacon. He notes that the fear of death happens not because people are simply scared about dying but rather because they fear everything else that surrounds death: "*Pompa mortis magis terret, quam mors ipsa*" (Bacon 344).[6] Rather than focus on people being scared of worms or of death, it is important to examine what ideas and situations surround the experience of death.

The connection between worms and death emphasised feelings of fear surrounding death, an effect evident in Medieval and Early Modern artwork. Although the amount of worm imagery, the mediums used, and the inclusion of worms in relation to other 'vermin' vary from country to country and across time periods, people in England did invoke worms in relation to discussions of death.[7] Generally, death as represented through *memento mori* was a common theme in Early Modern imagery. While not as common in Britain as in the rest of Western Europe, worms as a motif were an important part of British death iconography and were found both visually and figuratively entwined with different representations of death. However, worms were not exclusively included and different kinds of vermin were also incorporated in different works of art. Vermin were commonly invoked to emphasise ideas of corruption and to encourage the viewer to contemplate their own mortality. The inclusion of vermin was part of a convention where "tokens of death and corruption derived from medieval tradition that regarded vermin as natural components in the process of decomposition" (Oosterwijk 61). Vermin helped the corpse deteriorate by consuming bodies until they became cadavers, skeletons, and skulls, all of which were symbols of death.[8] I will discuss the representation of worms in relation to corruption in Chapter Two; however I will expand on their depiction to remind people about their own death in this chapter.

Historically, worms appeared in a variety of media reminding people of the connection between worms and decomposition and thereby their own mortality. The brass sculpture of Ralph Hamsterley (d.1518) in Oddington, England, visually displays worms as well as including them in its inscription: "The partly opened shroud with knots at both ends reveals worms crawling all over Ralph's skeletal corpse and even through his eye sockets and

mouth. The first part of the two-line scroll issuing from his mouth confirms what the viewer can see with his own eyes: 'Vermib[us] hic donor' (Here I am given to the worms)" (Oosterwijk 57; edit original). Worms take over the body once a person has died and begin to consume it. Consequently, cadaver tombs represent vermin consuming and overtaking the human corpse. Cadaver tombs feature sculptures of human-like corpses and skeletal or rotting remains and include a wide range of vermin. For example, the Tewkesbury effigy (c. 15th-16th century) has a toad, a worm or a serpent, and a beetle on the human remains (60-61). Visually, English cadaver tombs used worms sparingly when compared with other countries (52), but worms were often included in phrases that would decorate tombs. In Canterbury Cathedral, the memorial for Archbishop Chichele (d. 1443) includes the inscription, "'omnibus horribilis, pulvis, vermis, caro vilis' (horrible to all, dust, worms, my worthless flesh)" (44), and yet, as Oosterwijk notes, "his cadaver effigy is of the naked emaciated variety without any visible vermin" (55). Even if worms were not visually present with symbols of death and mortality, they were still included in representations through these inscriptions.

Additionally, worms were often used in Medieval representations of the story of the Three Dead and the Three Living. In the story, "three young nobles out hunting encounter three corpses in varying stages of decay who remind them about the vanity or earthly pleasures that they, too, once enjoyed: after all, the dead are what the living will be before too long" (Oosterwijk 48). Often paintings of the three corpses from the story are shown infested with worms. In St. Pega, Peakirk, Northamptonshire, *The Three Living and Three Dead* (14th century) has "[w]orms, slugs and other creatures feed[ing] on the actual decaying

corpses…" (Rouse 147).[9] Different states of decompensation were also represented through the Three Dead. For example, in a miniature from *Psalter of Robert de Lisle* (d. 1310),

> the one [corpse] immediately facing the living wears only a tattered shroud which can no longer hide the spectacle of worms feasting across his abdomen. Yet it is the shriveled naked carcass with a gaping chest cavity on the far right who contrasts most tellingly the extent of his body's decay with his former state in life in his verses to the living: 'Ore su si hidous et si nuz. / Kem oy uer ne deigne nuls' (But now I am so hideous and naked that even the worms scorn me). (Oosterwijk 50)

Here worms are connected with the human body and are shown to be part of its transformation from human to dust. In this miniature, the corpse displays the discomfort associated with decomposition since it views itself as "hideous." A visual representation of such displeasure is displayed in the "King of Terror" painting in Bardwell church, Suffolk (late 14th century). The skeleton clearly shows its fear about being overtaken by vermin: "the skeleton wears a crown and looks almost discomforted as not only worms but also toads and lizards crawl across his torso, arms and face" (Oosterwijk 51). Throughout artistic representations, worms are connected with their role in decomposition and the fate of the body once a person has died. Each of these pieces emphasizes the fear and discomfort associated with dying and being consumed by worms.

In order to establish distance between death and humans, death was associated with the unfamiliar: the other. William Engel notes the similarity between the term 'moors' for black people and 'mors' for death (72). In the Early Modern Period, Blackamoors were aligned with alien qualities and were part of "the view of the infidel as an avatar or harbinger of malignant forces in the world" (72). This view of otherness comes from a tradition where

the term moor "underscored for Christian readers not only the Muslims' religious and cultural otherness but also and more particularly their 'foreign,' racialized African origins" (Brann 312). Moors were viewed as outsiders to European and Christian culture. Additionally, with his accession, James I confirmed a religious-based conflict between Christians and Muslims (Matar 143). Moors were not only foreign, but they were a threat. As an example of the harm an infidel could cause, Engel provides the image of "Moor heralding Death" (d. 1510) where a Moor is blowing a horn, seemingly calling the destructive force of death.[10] The image suggests that not only does the Moor bring destruction but also that there is a connection between death and the moor. As the image emphasizes the connection between the alien figures of moors and the idea of death, death becomes aligned with the other. Death is not connected to European society but rather to an outsider and thereby death becomes an other too.

The problem with creating death as an other is that the distinction is unmanageable. Artistically, the connection between worms and death challenges attempts to completely separate humans and death. Just as a person is consumed and eaten by worms, death surrounds the person too. One example is *King Death* found in *The Mirrour which Flatters Not* (1639) by T. Carey. In the engraving, death's skeleton is covered with worms of either the snake or earthworm variety.[11] Worms were not only shown to be part of a body's decomposition but also were an integral part of death's personification as a whole. Additionally, in a similar way to decomposing human corpses, death is consumed by worms. As Oosterwijk describes, "In the N-town play of the death of Herod [c. 1460-1520], Death himself appears as a naked corpse, pointing out how 'wurmys knawe me al a-bowte', which suggests that the actor would have worn a suit decorated with worms and perhaps even other

vermin" (52). In this instance not only are worms part of the physical representation of death, but worms also consume death. In the play death tells the audience:

> Amongys wormys, as I yow telle,
>
> Vndyr the erth xul ye dwelle,
>
> And thei xul etyn both flesch and felle,
>
> As thei haue don me. (qtd. in Oosterwijk 76, n 60)

Not only are humans and death connected by worms simply because both are pictured with them, but both humans and death are eaten by worms. Through the similar experience of being eaten by worms, the difference between people and death disintegrates. As Engel suggests, despite attempts to put distance between death and people, through such images of bodily decomposition death becomes "both the image of the other and a gruesome reflection of each one of us after we have ceased to be. Thus it is a reminder of to what, and through what, state we all must pass" (75). Significantly, throughout this discussion it is apparent that death is tied to the eventual fate of the physical body. Worms are apparent in this circumstance as they are the ones that are directly tied to the body and act as a figurative connection between the body and death. Without worms and the act of decomposition the body would not transform into a cadaver or skeleton and become a representation of death. While death is a necessary part of life, the problem with the worm's involvement is that the meaningless and destructive nature of death is highlighted.

Mercutio

In order to explore Shakespeare's representation of a meaningless death, I will turn to Mercutio's lament about worms and his own meaningless death. After being stabbed by Tybalt and while dying, Mercutio asserts: "I am hurt / A plague o' both houses. I am sped"

(3.1.91-91). A few lines later he emphasises his curse by placing a second plague (106) and finally exits the play exclaiming "Your houses!" (108). For Mercutio the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets, the two houses, is tied to his death. However, from an outside perspective Mercutio's death can be associated with factors beyond the feud. Raymond Utterback argues that Mercutio's death is caused by his own rashness or the actions of Romeo and Tybalt: "It would be far more logical, then, for Mercutio to blame his own rashness, or Tybalt, or Romeo's interference (as to some extent he does) rather than the feud" (112). For Utterback, Mercutio's rashness is apparent when he calls Tybalt back and essentially challenges Tybalt for his life (110-111). While Utterback finds Mercutio to be directly involved in his own death, I argue it is important that Mercutio focuses on the influence of the family feud and loss of control surrounding his death as it highlights the connection between worms and the meaningless nature of death.

Despite death's destructive qualities, during the Early Modern Period, theoretically, people were to accept death whenever it was their time to die. The acceptance of death fits within the idea that evil is a necessary part of the natural world. As Arthur Lovejoy explains, evil must exist in the world in order for good to exist: "the goodness of this best of possible worlds consists, not in the absence of evils, but rather in their presence…" (72). Just as evil is needed, death's destruction is needed in order for goodness to exist. With regard to death, the destruction and decomposition of the body must happen in order for salvation to occur. Death helps people by providing a method for a person to escape from the mortal world and all of the torments that come along with living. David Cressy notes that death was not presented as a pleasant stage of life; however it was still to be anticipated happily as it allowed a person to start living a better life: "The faithful in Christian England were conditioned to expect a

happier life beyond the painful passages of dying, on the other side of this present vale of tears" (383). The transition to a better life occurred as a result of the separation between the body and the soul that occurred at death, allowing the person's soul to be released and leave their faulty mortal body behind: "According to orthodox belief, body and soul became unhinged at the moment of death and went their separate ways. Kissed by God, the soul was the animating principle. The body was merely a vehicle or an encumbrance. At death the immortal soul flew off on its mysterious journey, while the material human husk began the process of decomposition" (384). The moment of death was then important because at the moment when body and soul separated, the soul was free of mortal temptations and sin. For the period, death was important as it allowed the person to become closer to God.

Another important aspect of dying during the Early Modern Period was accepting that death comes to all only when God has planned. As George Strode notes, "Befides, it is God that hath ailigued to every one of us the meafure of our time; hee hath appointed to us the number of our days: our life did not begin, till he appointed the firft day of it; and fo long it muft laft, until he fay, this is the laft day of it" (274). As described by Lucinda Becker, while dying, someone must be "*ready*, but not eager, for death, and *happy* to leave their fate in the hands of God" (118; emphasis added). While Becker focuses on women in her study, these same attributes can be applied to men. People were supposed to let God decide when they were going to die and not take the act into their own hands. For instance, suicide was the worst type of death: "Suicide was the ultimate Early Modern bad death. Defined as self-murder, with no hope of salvation and condemned by all sectors of society, it was viewed with horror by those who witnessed it and would bring shame not only upon the individual concerned, but also stigmatization and financial penalties against the family of the deceased"

(Becker 88). Additionally, contempt for those who committed suicide extended well after their death with some of the dead being tried for committing self-murder. If found guilty, the person who committed suicide was excommunicated and "their bodies [were] punished after death, by the denial of Christian burial" (Gittings 150). Due to the importance of death to realizing the promise of connecting with God, society developed a manner of 'dying well.' Clare Gittings describes 'dying well' in relation to preparing for death: "Making a will ordering one's earthly possessions was just one element in preparing 'to die well' in early modern England. It was also necessary to be at peace with God and with one's fellow men. Particularly important was to make all the right speeches before one died and, as in previous centuries, to be conscious at death" (155). People were therefore regulated in their relationship with death and were only supposed to interact with this facet of life in particular ways so that they could raise themselves as close to God as possible.

With such an emphasis placed on the importance and meaning behind death, Mercutio's sudden death is problematic. He is not allowed any time to prepare, and his death happens suddenly. As briefly mentioned above, preparing for death was a significant aspect in dying well and part of the reason was tied to salvation. As described by Gittings, death focused on the individual because, with the rise of Protestantism, the individual controlled their own salvation:

> Protestants of all persuasions agreed that the fate of the soul was sealed at death. The actions of the living could have no effect on the dead (nor, officially, could the dead return as ghosts to haunt the living, despite Hamlet's encounters). This created a new relationship between life and death, one which was far more individualistic. The moment of death became more decisive for the dying, particularly since, in a further

> turn of the Protestant screw, it was essential for salvation to remain perpetually doubtful of your own worthiness. (153)

As the action of dying affected an individual's salvation, being properly prepared was essential. In order to help distinguish what constituted a good death, society established definitions for bad deaths: "Three common sorts of bad death may be distinguished: failure to meet the final test despite having the chance to prepare for it; sudden death without warning; and willful self-destruction" (Houlbrooke 207). For my discussion of Mercutio, the impact of a sudden death is important. The problem with sudden deaths is that when they happened the individual may not have been able to prepare correctly and therefore their own salvation may be affected. Due to this potential effect, sudden deaths were regarded as more harmful than helpful. As described by Philippe Ariès, when someone had a sudden death, or *mors repentina*, and were not able to prepare for their death, dying became meaningless: "When [death] did not give advanced warning, it ceased to be regarded as necessity that, although frightening, was expected and accepted, like it or not. It destroyed the order of the world in which everyone believed; it became the absurd instrument of chance, which was sometimes disguised as the wrath of God" (10). Since Mercutio has a sudden death the meaning behind his death is called into question. In Mercutio's case the destructive nature of death is related to the destructive nature of the Montagues' and Capulets' feud in Verona.

As described by Barry Adams, in all of his speeches the Prince is primarily concerned with the general stability of Verona: "Speaking in his official capacity as chief political representative of Verona, the Prince is quite naturally concerned above all with the public nature of the disturbance, and as a result the bulk of his speech deals with Verona's 'streets' and 'Citizens' rather than with the particular individuals involved" (33). This concern is

apparent early on in the play as the Prince refers to fighting members of the families as "Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace…" (1.1.77). For Eric Langley, the situation in Verona is similar to a civil war:

> In Verona, the single state divides, as two seemingly selfsame groups turn against each other (effectively against themselves); the play's action and expression fractures along these fault-lines. Civil war in the state is reflected in or driven by linguistic civil war, social and poetic fracture becoming encapsulated in a word. As the hands of civilians are made uncivilized by the shedding of civil blood, 'civil' turns back upon itself, making itself unclean via *paregmenon,* enacting violence upon itself, committing linguistic suicide in self-denial. (121)

Langley's connection between the feud and the idea of civil war as suicide is important as it highlights how much damage the feud does to Verona. Arthur Droge and James Tabor explain that suicide was made an executional offence as the individual is "the subject of the state, the state owned the individual's body, and only the state could dispose of it. Suicide was an act of rebellion, not only against God but also against the state, that must be suppressed at all costs" (6). Suicide was problematic as it challenged the naturalized operations of society and the feud is similar as the actions of individuals have caused the state to not operate as intended.

The Prince's actions highlight his concern about the state of Verona. In an effort to re-establish peace and order, the Prince instates consequences for partaking in the feud: "If ever you disturb our streets again / Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace" (1.1.92-93). The Prince attempts to regain stability and uses the threat of death to enforce his order. Through his declaration, the Prince makes death meaningful since the execution of a person

would be done in an attempt to restore stability. The Prince would not execute people simply because he wants to kill someone. Unfortunately, Mercutio's death does not match the Prince's use of death as Mercutio's death is not controlled.

While Mercutio and Tybalt are fighting, Romeo attempts to stop them so that they will not be executed by the Prince. The problem is that in an effort to stop the fight, Romeo causes Mercutio to be stabbed by Tybalt: "Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm" (3.1.102-103). As previously discussed, when he is dying, Mercutio places "a plague o' both your houses" (106), thereby asserting that Tybalt, Romeo, and the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues have caused his death. Through the use of 'your' Mercutio insinuates that he had no control over his death. Personal control and meaning in dying are important as they can make illegal actions legal. As mentioned, suicide was a crime as it disrupted society. However, in certain instances such as martyrdom, suicide was accepted. As summarized by Droge and Taylor, based on examples from the Apocrypha, in order for a suicide to be accepted by society, the death had to meet five criteria:

> First, [these deaths] reflect situations of opposition and persecution. Second, the choice to die, which these individuals make, is viewed by the authors as necessary, noble, and heroic. Third, these individuals are often eager to die; indeed, in several cases they end up directly *killing themselves*. Fourth, there is often the idea of vicarious benefit resulting from their suffering and death. And finally, the expectation of vindication and reward beyond death, more often than not, is a prime motivation for their choice of death. (75; emphasis original)

While Mercutio is not the one committing suicide, his death is part of the larger self-destructive and overall suicidal narrative that is occurring in Verona. Owing to this context,

Droge and Taylor's characteristics of a meaningful and acceptable voluntary death help demonstrate the meaninglessness surrounding Mercutio's death. Importantly, Mercutio does not perceive his death as having a purpose as he was killed by Romeo's interruption: an action caused by the Prince's order to control the feud. Rather, to Mercutio, his death is part of the self-destruction the state is undergoing as a result of the feud. He does not want to die and does not purposefully let Tybalt kill him. Mercutio is not trying to be a martyr for the cause and his death does nothing to reestablish a peaceful society. Overall his death actually causes more destruction as it leads to the eventual death of several more people. Mercutio's death fits in the idea that "[d]eath stands for all those natural forces that threaten to reduce the painstakingly constructed order of society to chaos…" (Neill 14). Since Mercutio's death has no meaning or purpose, it is greeted with contempt. In the end, Mercutio laments his death and states: "They have made worms' meat of me" (3.1.107). With the circumstances of Mercutio's death in mind, the representation of worms highlights the meaninglessness of death. The only thing achieved by Mercutio's death is for worms to get dinner. Like the civil war that consumes and destroys Verona, worms are perceived as arriving too soon and not allowing Mercutio to have a death he views as *necessary*. Becoming worm food does nothing to restore society and Mercutio has no time to make amends with God and prepare for his death. The reference to Mercutio's becoming worm's meat begins to show why death was generally more feared than accepted.

Despite theoretical ideas of salvation, death was feared: "Death, in the theatre and iconography of Shakespeare's age, is routinely a force of considerable fear…" (MacKenzie 117). One of the main reasons for dreading death was physical decomposition. As Gittings describes, there was an increase in the use of coffins during the start of the 17th century due

to “a greater distance developing between the living and the dead and a growing desire to conceal bodily decay” (157). In order to avoid witnessing decomposition and being reminded of one’s own mortality, people sought to hide dead bodies from site. Decay was problematic as it highlighted the removal of social constructs such as social hierarchies and individuality since, through death, everyone, regardless of who they were, was reduced to a skeleton. Michael Neill highlights the idea in relation to *Macbeth*: “the horror of Macbeth’s fate lies precisely in the sense of desperate narrative incoherence produced by the contemplation of his own death: when the end is recognized not as fulfilment but as an utter emptying out of meaning, then life is reduced to the senseless confusion of ‘a tale told by an idiot’” (205). Death’s ability to destroy carefully created facets of life and society caused people to fear death rather than to focus on the theoretically suggested positives. While I have started to unpack these ideas through Mercutio’s death, specific examples of the erasure of social systems are apparent in *Hamlet*, *Richard II*, and a selection of the Sonnets.

Hamlet

While in the graveyard, Hamlet and Horatio watch two clowns dig Ophelia’s grave and throw several skulls up. While examining one skull, Hamlet notes the skull could “sing once” (*Ham*. 5.1.75-76) and could speak. The skull once was part of a person who may have been a “politician” (78) or “a courtier” (81). However, now that the person has died and their body decomposed, the skull has lost all distinguishing features and could easily be any one of a number of people. In Hamlet’s lines it is apparent how death “steals away the difference by and for which we live” (Waston qtd. in MacKenzie 102). The removal of identity is further emphasized when the First Clown tells Hamlet that there is little difference in how long it takes for someone to decompose: “I' faith, if a be not rotten before a die — as we have many

pocky corses nowadays, that will scarce hold the laying in — a will last you some eight year or nine year. A tanner will last you nine year" (5.1.160-163). The clown does note some difference for decomposition but he does not consider the length of time with regard to the social position of the person. The only real differences are caused by the body and its state at the time of death. The Clown notes that if a body is corrupt it will decompose faster but the Clown is focusing on physical composition and not identity. The rate of decomposition depends on the state of the body when someone dies. For example, if a person was completely healthy when they died their body would not decompose, or rot, as fast as someone who was ill. Once someone is ill their body has been figuratively corrupted and is no longer pristine. For example, a "pocky" corpse has already started to deteriorate, it "will scarce hold the laying in" (161), so it has fewer stages of decomposition to go through before it is just a skeleton. The tanner's body is unique as it takes longer for their body to decompose. In essence, the tanner's body has an extra layer of protection to it that prevents death and corruption from penetrating and deteriorating the body. As the Clown tells Hamlet, "his hide is so tanned with his trade that a will keep out water a great while, and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body" (5.1.165-167). Yes, the tanner's job causes his body to last longer, but logically, if a noble did the same amount of tanning as the tanner, their body would last just as long. Decomposition does not care who you once were so much as what state your body is in.

Hamlet brings worms into the discussion of identity when he remarks that the skull he is examining no longer belongs to one person but rather is now "my Lady Worm's …" (5.1.86). Part of Hamlet's depiction of worms can be tied to death and Hamlet's remarking on the interconnection between figures of death and worms. However, by giving worms

ownership of the body, Hamlet is challenging social ideas surrounding death and the body. Cressy comments how "[o]nce buried, a body could not be exhumed without official permission. On the road to decomposition, and patiently awaiting the general resurrection, it belonged to no one. It lay, now, in God's freehold, and was subject to ecclesiastical cognizance if removed or abused" (389). Cressy does include decomposition in the process of dying, but it is his note that the body "belonged to no one" that is interesting since Hamlet's reference to my Lady Worm directly challenges this idea. It was important that the body be left alone as it was to wait until Resurrection when it would be reunited with the soul and, hopefully, reach salvation. By referencing the worm's role in the intermediary stage between death and salvation Hamlet highlights how worms can come between and challenge social constructions of how the natural world should operate.

One other important factor of the term "Lady Worm" is its similarity to a type of Medieval German artwork. In Germany there was a number of sculptures of *Frau Welt* or, as Oosterwijk translates, "Lady World" (50). The connection between the two terms extends beyond the similarity in name as these sculptures were covered with worms. Like the cadaver tombs and sculpture discussed earlier, *Frau Welt* sculptures show an untouched human figure from the front, but with a vermin infested backside. Oosterwijk explains that the dual representation of these sculptures highlights both *vanitas* and ideas of "superficial attractions of the body" (50). By the time Hamlet finds his Lady Worm, the body has already been consumed, so his figure looks different than that of *Frau Welt*. However, the connection between the two is important as it serves as a reminder that death and especially worms come for all and, no matter how you once looked, or who you were, you will become a skeleton in the end.

Additionally, the issue of ownership challenges the separation between the dead and animals that was to be instated: "The churchyard stile, specified in the prayer book as the place where the minister should meet the corpse, was supposed to be the animal-proof entrance to this haven…" (Cressy 467). I do acknowledge that in general the animals that Cressy is referring to would have been larger animals such as cattle and dogs, but Lady Worm does challenge the separation. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the separation between humans and animals was an important social construct that revolved around the identity and definition of the human. This is important for the current discussion as Lady Worm highlights how, despite social attempts to keep the body removed from earthly ownership and external interaction, worms could take over. In this case worms become the owners of all bodies while they are in the earth. In summary, Hamlet's focus on worms in the graveyard reminds us that, in the end, all bodies end up consumed by worms regardless of who you once were. In the end death removes ideas of identity and shows the destruction death, and specifically worms, cause.

Richard II

In *Richard II* the presence of worms begins to challenge ideas of succession. In 3.2 Richard II returns to England in an attempt to stop Bolingbroke's rebellion. Unfortunately, Richard learns that he has returned one day too late and has lost all of his supporters. Ernst Kantorowicz notes that, once Richard has realized he has lost his crown, he focuses on his body natural rather than his body politic (30-31). As part of this focus, Richard forgoes talking about any attempt to regain his crown and instead states: "Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs…" (*R2 3.2.*141). Richard's focus on the physical and what happens to the body rather than the soul when we die is emphasised a few lines later when he says:

"Let's choose executors and talk of wills- / And yet not so, for what can we bequeath / Save our deposèd bodies to the ground?" (144-146). In these lines Richard forgoes planning for his death as one is supposed to do in order to ensure they die well. Instead, Richard highlights that in the end all people are able to do is give our bodies to the ground. His focus on the body is significant as it dissolves an important aspect of the body politic. Unlike the body natural which dies, the body politic, which Kantorowicz equates to a soul, transfers to the next monarch and their body natural. In this way, the body politic can be viewed as a type of inheritance that one monarch passes along to the next. By stating that there is nothing he can pass along and that there is "nothing can we call our own but death, / And the small model of the barren earth / Which serves as paste and cover to our bones" (3.2.148-150), Richard suggest that he either lacks a body politic, which would challenge his right to be King, or that there is no body politic to begin with. The second implication of Richard saying he has no body politic and thereby no inheritance is that it removes his own immortality. Kantorowicz suggests that, by having the body politic transfer to the next monarch, the current monarch transfers as well (13-14). For example, part of Henry VIII transferred to Edward VI when Henry VIII died. By eliminating his body politic, Richard removes his soul and the ability to live after death. As Kantorowicz suggests, "this 'incarnation' of the body politic in a kind of flesh not only does away with the human imperfections of the body natural, but conveys 'immortality' to the individual king as King, that is, with regard to his superbody" (13). With the removal of a body politic, Richard is unable to achieve any type of earthly salvation as he cannot escape from the wrongs of his natural body nor can he live after he dies. The lack of inheritance not only leaves nothing behind for others but damages Richard too.

That Richard is willing to talk about graves, worms, and epitaphs suggests that these are aspects of dying that are important, unlike executors and wills which he ignores. As Richard highlights, now that he has been overthrown, all he and his friends have left to "call our own" is death. They have no physical possessions left to give away in their wills. Worms in essence are their only inheritors as worms eat the body which is all Richard and his friends can "bequeath." It is therefore worms who gain the most from someone's death. The dead can take nothing with them, and the living receive nothing from the dead. Richard's discussion of death and inheritance calls into question what people leave behind when they die and whether there is any continuation of a person after death. Richard's reference to worms then begins to start questioning the idea of natural succession. If someone is unable to make any direct impact and leave anything behind for their descendants, the person has no control over the world; their actions mean nothing. All a person can seemingly do is die and have the natural world consume them.

Sonnets

In a similar manner to their role in *Richard II*, worms as depicted in Shakespeare's sonnets highlight the interruption of inheritance. In Sonnets 6, 71, 74, and 146 worms challenge ideas of resurrection and thereby question the immortality of the soul. While living, people are subject to sin due to the Fall. While there is discussion over whether the body corrupts the soul or the soul corrupts the body, there is a general consensus in the period that, after separation through death and then eventual reunification at Resurrection, body and soul will both have been returned to the sinless state: "Models of the happy relationship are found in man before the Fall and after the Resurrection, when a perfected

body will be joined to a purified soul" (Osmond 26). The problem with worms in the Sonnets is that they do not always allow this reunification to happen.

In "Sonnet 6" the speaker warns the young man, his addressee, that he must leave behind his own legacy or else he will "be death's conquest and make worms thine heir" (14). Unlike Richard II, the speaker is suggesting to the young man that he is able to leave more behind than just his dead body. However, the young man must create something, such as a child, to leave behind: "That's for thyself to breed another thee…" (7). If this breeding happens, then death would be able to do little to the young man, but if the young man does nothing and does not have a child, then he becomes "death's conquest" (14). Worms in this instance, therefore, are suggested to be the inheritors of what is initially created such as the physical body. What is created after the initial physical body does not directly belong to worms. While the sonnet suggests that there is a way for someone to prevent a worm disturbing the idea of inheritance, the sonnet still demonstrates how worms disrupt ideas of succession. The consequence of this interruption is highlighted in the other sonnets.

"Sonnet 71" makes a case against grieving. The speaker does not want his beloved to mourn for him once he has died, so that the world will not "mock you with me after I am gone" (14). The speaker focuses here on the beloved rather than himself because, since "being mourned by the survivor can be of no personal benefit to one who is dwelling with worms and compounded with clay, the only object of the poet's concern must be the beloved's own future" (Vendler 328). However, since the speaker can leave nothing behind for his beloved, worms become his only inheritors. The importance of the speaker's future among worms is that it is the only future that is mentioned: "Give warning to the world that I am fled / From this vile world with vildest worms to dwell" (*Son.* 71.3-4). Rather than note

the separation of the body and soul and their different destinations at death, the speaker focuses on the physical; he will only dwell with worms. Of equal importance, the speaker is moving from a "vile" world to "vildest" worms. The speaker does not escape the torment of the world and is instead equally tormented. Worms may be a natural part of the body's decomposition, but when they interrupt the separation of body and soul they become problematic.

Sonnet 146 focuses on the end of life, and the speaker critiques how people live, making the case that there is no use in being extravagant when one is alive since, once they die, they do not get to keep anything. Rather, after they die "Shall worms, inheritors of this excess, / Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?" (7-8). The speaker is again connecting worms and dying but, in this instance, they note that at the end of someone's life, it is worms that inherit all earthly goods. The difference between this sonnet and those discussed above is the inclusion of a detailed discussion of the soul. Helen Vendler discusses how the soul has become subordinate to the body and its earthy passions. Owing to a shift, the soul is unable to care for itself and eventually becomes subordinate to death: "The soul has been feeding its rebel powers instead of itself, and consequently it pines within…. And when the body those powers inhabit falls victim to mortality, worms will *eat up* the soul's charge, and profit from its excess" (613; emphasis original). Since the soul was not cared for while the person was alive, when the person dies the soul cannot transcend from Earth as it should. Instead, while living, the soul is stuck feeding on the excess of earthy passions and even in death remains trapped inside the body. Due to this entrapment, Vendler suggests, "[t]here is no passing through, even in the imagination, to the other side of death" (614). The soul is unable to fully separate from the body and therefore body and soul are unable to have a proper reunion and

become purified at the time of Resurrection. In essence, since worms rather than the soul become the figure that benefits from death, there is an interruption in how the metaphysical process of death should occur.

In contrast to the previous sonnets, Sonnet 74 highlights what happens when the natural separation of body and soul is allowed to occur. Rather than focus on the physicality of death, the speaker tells the reader to remember them and, through memory, to obtain the best of the speaker. Through death the "dregs of life" (*Son.* 74.9) are removed and the spirit, the best of the speaker, remains. Worms are used by the speaker in relation to the discussion of their body which will be eaten by worms once they die:

> So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
>
> The prey of worms, my body being dead,
>
> The coward conquest of wretch's knife,
>
> Too base of thee to be rememberèd. (9-12)

Worms in this instance are not used to highlight any underlying metaphors but rather to make the connection between dying and becoming worm food. However, in this instance the reality of becoming worm food is not entirely problematic as it allows the worst aspect of life, the body, to be removed. In this instance worms have returned to their expected place in society as decomposers: "The earth can have but earth, which is his due…" (7). Significantly, by relegating worms to only inheriting the body, the speaker's soul is free to escape the body as should happen at death.

Conclusion

Overall, based on analysis of worms and death in this chapter, it becomes clear that worms help display the tension that is present between theoretical and actual representations

and discussion surrounding death in Early Modern England. In Shakespeare's works worms play an important role in connecting various characters to death. Worms serve as both a reminder of death and the journey from living body to skeleton that comes along with it. Worms are the agents that transform the body and stay with it until it is time for the body to be reunited with the soul. However, worms highlight the fear associated with death as the characters are reminded of the meaninglessness that may accompany death.

When worms and death are feared it is because there is some disruption of other societal ideas that stabilized society. For example, many of the usages of worms in relation to humans becoming worm food focus on instances when death appears to be happening without meaning. A person is unable to keep their own individuality, which affects their salvation, and they are unable to pass anything along to continue the stability of society. The relationship between worms and death is therefore important as it highlights the destructive qualities of both worms and death. The presence of worms suggests that the metaphysical processes in society are not functioning as they should.

Chapter Two

Homo Vermis: Entanglement

"Wee all are creeping Wormes of th' earth" (Hartlib 1). The opening line to Samuel Hartlib's poem "Homo Vermis" (1655) presents a frightening reality for people. Rather than being distinct from worms and separate within our own category, we all are only worms. In this chapter, I will further explore the uncertainty that arises when living humans and worms are connected. Previously I discussed the relationship between the body and worms after death and how the representation of worms challenges the meaning and purpose of death. Hartlib draws on these concepts when he ends his poem by reminding the reader: "Death then ſets his foot and kills us" (12). However, Hartlib's poem takes the problems of death one step further. Not only does death level all humans by removing social stratification, but as Hartlib highlights, death challenges the human / animal divide. Despite the difference, death kills both humans and animals. Death brings humans to the same level as worms, but it is not only the dead who are the same as worms but also the living. Throughout his poem, Hartlib reminds his reader that humans are not above or entirely different from worms. One connection he makes is the division of society. Just as people are relegated to different social categories, Hartlib characterizes different worms based upon status and personality:

> Some are Silk-Worms great by birth,
>
> Glow-Worms ſome that ſhine by night,
>
> Slow-Worms others, apt to b[i]te,
>
> Some are muck-Worms ſlaves to wealth,
>
> Maw-Worms ſome that wrong the health,
>
> Some to the publique no good willers,

Cancker-Worms and Cater-pillers. (2-8)

In these lines, Hartlib highlights contemporary views of each kind of worm and he relates the human interpretation of each worm to different types of people based on particular characteristics. For instance, the connection between certain people and caterpillars is their destructive nature. Caterpillars, and actual worms, were problematic because of their appetites, caterpillars being viewed as "gluttonous devourers of trees and herbs" (Moffet qtd. in MacInnes 263). The poor, who during the Early Modern Period were described as "caterpillars of the commonwealth," were viewed as equally problematic as "they were understood primarily as unproductive [in society], consuming without returning anything" (MacInnes 261). Both actual caterpillars and human caterpillars 'ate' without producing anything productive and, thereby, "to the publique [are] no good willers" (Hartlib 7). The connection between people and worms, or caterpillars, is significant as it breaks down the taxonomical distinction between humans and animals. As Erica Fudge describes, "Anthropocentrism creates anthropomorphism: for the ox to be willing it must have a will. Where human power over animals is represented it often undercuts humanity as a separate category (*Perceiving* 4). By saying worms have characteristics that are similar to people, Hartlib weakens the separation between people and worms.

Humans and Animals

The deterioration of difference between humans and worms is problematic as it challenges the conceptual separation between humans and animals altogether. A primary concern during the Early Modern Period was the definition of man and what made people different from animals. Often the presumed capacity for rationality differentiated humans and animals. As summarized by Keith Thomas, "According to Aristotle, the soul comprised three

elements: the nutritive soul, which was shared by man with vegetables; the sensitive soul, which was shared with animals; and the intellectual or rational soul, which was peculiar to man" (30). It is the idea of a rational soul which will be the focus of this chapter along with the relationship between the presence of worms and the deteriorating soul. While many observations were presented in the Early Modern Period as to the difference between human and animal, humans could still be subject to animal passions. Thomas asks: "What, for example, were religion and morality, if not attempts to curb the supposedly animal aspects of human nature, what Plato called 'the wild beast within us'?" (36). If people were to give in to these passions, they would be viewed as less than human. Insults relied on this idea and were often used to purposefully make a connection between humans and animals in order to demean the person being insulted. No matter the animal that the person is being connected to, the purposeful link between them suggests that the person is no different from an animal and "should be treated as such" (4). To lack a quality that made someone distinctly human was to become demoted to being "subhuman, semi-animal" (41).

Shakespeare himself uses the term worm as an insult in order to both mock characters and to place them below others. For instance, in *The Taming of the Shrew* Katharina refers to Blanca and Widow as "forward and unable worms" (5.2.174). In this instance Katharina relies on the idea of humans being superior to animals. By calling the other women worms she raises herself above them in order to show her superior knowledge about how to act toward her husband. In a similar way, in *Henry IV part 1* Gadshill remarks that he is joined by "none of these mad mustachio / purple-hued malt-worms" (2.1.74-75) and is instead, therefore, part of the gentry. Through this insult to the lower drinking classes, Gadshill separates and raises himself up so that he is on an equal footing to characters such as Falstaff

and Prince Henry. Of additional importance is the use of "malt-worms" in Gadshill's insult. In this line he refers to his drinking companions as drunkards and therefore suggests that these characters have given in to their animal instincts. Additionally, as evident from these two examples, when characters 'become' animals, separation is an important element of the transition. By raising themselves, Katharina and Gadshill suggest that they themselves are not worms.

In "Homo Vermis" the demotion of human to subhuman is emphasized through the removal of specific human-only characteristics. Once we have become worms, we no longer walk but rather we are "Found about the earth wee'r crawling" (Hartlib 9). By definition "men walked; birds flew; only fish swam" (Thomas 39). By having us crawl once we are worms, Hartlib removes one of our specific human qualities: walking upright. Additionally, we are forced to eat rotting food just like the worms that eat decomposing flesh: "Putrid ſtuff we ſuck it fills us" (Hartlib 11). Finally at the end, Hartlib summarizes our worm life as "a ſorry life" (10). The erasure of many human qualities makes our lives worse. Hartlib is not alone in suggesting that the connection between worms and humans degrades humans. When discussing Homer's depiction of Harpalion, Edward Topsel notes that, rather than present Harpalion dying heroically, Homer makes him weak: "But here this pusillanimous and fordidous minded man Harpalion, seemed to be disgraced by his refembling to a poore Worm, being peraduenture a man of so small eftimation, and vile condition, as that no greater comparison feemed to fit him" (*Serpents* 309). Harpalion's situation is an example of the sorry life that Hartlib refers to. When people become worms they have no great qualities.

In this chapter I will discuss the breakdown of the distinctions between living people and animals that was so important during the Early Modern Period. Instead of focusing on

the connection between worms and the dead, I will discuss the relationship worms have to the living. In this instance the destruction of society is still evident; but rather than meaninglessness destroying society, it is human corruption that ruins the world. Along with this shift, I move from what is expected of worms to what is harmful. Previously, I discussed how worms and bodies were naturally expected to be joined by decomposition; no one was surprised when worms eventually ate the body. However, when worms begin to eat the soul problems arise. Through ideas of spiritual consumption and corruption, the delineation between humans and worms, and by extension animals, breaks down. The connection between humans and worms highlights the destruction that human corruption can have not only for the individual but for society as well.

Worm of Conscience

In a footnote, Amanda Bailey comments upon Shakespeare's references to worms in his plays: "With the exception of *Hamlet*, worms in Shakespeare's plays mostly evoke their religious and moral connotations" (236, n 34). While I do not necessarily agree that there should be such a strong focus on religious and moral connotations when generally analyzing Shakespeare's representation of worms, the focus is important to discuss, especially in relation to the invocation of worms in a religious context during the period. Bailey notes that, from a religious standpoint, the reality that everyone becomes worm food was invoked to emphasize that "during our time on earth we may be also be plagued by the worm of conscience…" (Bailey 229). The levelling aspect of worms was discussed in Chapter One, so in this chapter I will focus on worms as a symbol of a person's conscience. In general, the conscience is located within a person to ensure truthfulness. Katherine Maus explains, in reference to *Hamlet*, how the inside is perceived as a more honest representation of a person

in comparison to a false outside: "For Hamlet, the internal experience of his grief 'passes show' in two senses. It is beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it. And it *surpasses* the visible – its validity is unimpeachable. The exterior, by contrast, is partial, misleading, falsifiable, unsubstantial" (4; emphasis original). As the conscience is located inside someone, it is closest to who a person truly is. The conscience is able to regulate, or try to regulate, someone since the conscience has access to a person's true intentions whether they be pious or sinful. Additionally, being located inside someone, the conscience has close access to God. As a challenge to atheism, William Perkins questions who other than the individual sees their conscience and suggests it is only God:

> Furthermore, to whom is it [the conscience] a witness? Neither to man, nor to angels: for it is impossible that any man or angel should either hear the voice of conscience, or re-ceive the testimony thereof, or yet discern what is in the heart of man. Hereupon it follows, that there is substance, most wise, most powerful, most holy, that sees and bears record, and that is God himself. (qtd. in Maus 10-11)

If the purpose of the conscience is to remind a person that they are sinning, this reminder needs to be close to God as God is the only one who will eventually decide if someone has lived a pious life. Therefore it is important that God would need to know the true intentions of a person. Locating the conscience in the same space as God ensures that the conscience is helping the person change their actions for God and God alone. The worm of conscience is important as it is conceptualized to achieve this goal.

The concept of the worm of conscience arises from a religious context where bodily worms were presented "as a cause, a symptom, and a punisher of weakness and sin" (Skuse 70). The fate of the impious relates back to the destructive eating characteristics of worms

mentioned in Chapter One. In *The King James Bible*, the pious are told: "Feare ye not the reproch of men, neither be yee afraid of their reuilings. For the moth fhall eate them vp like a garment, and the worme fhal eate them like wooll…" (Isa. 51:7-8). Later on, the fate of the unrighteous is described as being eternal since "their worme fhall not die, neither fhall their fire be quenched, and they fhall be an abhorring vnto all flefh" (66: 24). Such a fate of eternal torment should therefore be avoided, as it will only "deprive [sinners] of all their delights which here they desire; and they cannot but at least fear it will take from them all pleasure, and bring them to easeless, and yet endless, pain, and torments intolerable, and yet unspeakable" (Smith qtd in Fuller 169). For sinners, worms are a representative of their punishment and damnation.

The connection between worms and sinners is reminiscent of Eve's interactions with the serpent in Genesis and the problem of original sin. Despite knowing that she has been forbidden to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, Eve decides to do so after the serpent tells her what she will obtain, and she realizes the benefits of doing so: "For God doeth know, that in the day ye eate thereof, then your eyes fhalt bee opened: and yee fhall bee as Gods knowing good and euil. And when the woman faw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be defired to make one wife, she tooke of the fruit thereof, and did eate, and gaue alfo unto her hufband with her, and hee did eate" (Gen. 3:5-6). In this instance, the involvement of the serpent is representative of Eve's and Adam's ability to sin. While there is a long history of theological debate over whether Eve or Adam is to blame for original sin, both present the capacity to sin as both went against God and ate from the Tree.[12] The serpent's involvement is to provide the temptation to sin, and for its involvement it is equally punished and equally connected to humanity's original sin: "And the LORD God

faid unto the Serpent, Becaufe thou haft done this, thou art cursed aboue all cattel, and aboue euery beft of the field" (3:14). Extending back to and building on my discussion of worms, both the serpent in Genesis and the worm of conscience are connected to acts of sin and serve as symbols of these sins.

Additionally, a sinner's fate of being eaten by worms is reminiscent of Adam and Eve's mortal fate. After Adam and Eve eat from the Tree, God punishes both of them. He tells Adam: "cursed is the ground for thy sake: in forow fhalt thou eate of it all the dayes of thy life. Thornes alfo and thiftles fhall it bring forth to thee: and thou fhalt eate the herbe of the field" (Gen. 3:17-18). For Eve's punishment, God tells her: "I will greatly multiply thy forowe and thy conceptin. In forow thou fhalt bring forth children: and thy defire fhall be to thy husband, and hee fhall rule ouer thee" (3:16). In both instances, just as in the case of the worms that continually gnaw on sinners, Adam and Eve will be continually reminded about their sin as their punishments will always follow them while they are alive. God tells them they will live with their punishments until "thou returne unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust fhalt thou returne" (3:19). By making Adam and Eve return to dust, God damns them to a fate with worms for, as Job notes, eventually all "shall lie downe alike in the duft and the wormes fhall couer them" (Job 21:26). To sin is to fall and be eaten by worms. Therefore, theologically, a fate linked with worms not only reminds the individual sinner of their sins, but worms serve as a reminder of all of humanity's fall and are thus symbolic of damnation.

Overall, worms are supposed to help sinners repent by acting as a type of punishment and a symbol of all the destruction, harm, and pain that sinning has done and can do. Henry Smith suggests that since sinners know sinning means they will be tormented, inside of them

"they feel a stinging fear, [and] their greatest confidence is not without trembling of conscience" (169). Worms become connected to the conscience based on the reality of living worms eating people from within. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, worms were connected with many diseases that killed a person from within. The idea of a worm eating someone internally became the basis for a worm of conscience that metaphorically eats someone from the inside. A person can be "literally 'eaten up' by guilt" (Skuse 71). Since the righteous have "consciences quiet" (Smith qtd in Fuller 170), if someone feels the worm gnawing them, they are reminded "how [they] have slacked [in their] duty" (Latimer "The Seventh Sermon") and are not living a faithful life.

Consumption

The basis for the worm of conscience was the importance of physical consumption. Rather than sting someone as in Smith's fear or as serpents and snakes do, worms eat and consume things. The difference between the two concepts is killing versus destruction. Shakespeare does not directly connect the act of stinging someone to the general term worm; rather, stinging happens when the worm has been specifically depicted as a particular animal. This clarification is also apparent in Hermia's accusation of Demetrius as discussed in Chapter One. When accusing Demetrius of killing Lysander, Hermia begins by asking, "Could not a worm, an adder, do so much?" but then asserts: "An adder did it; for with doubler tongue / Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung" (3.2.71; 72-73). Hermia very particularly asserts that an adder stung and not a worm. Yes, an adder can be referred to as a worm, but Shakespeare does not switch the terms from adder to worm as he does elsewhere. Also in *Macbeth*, one of the witches refers to the "blind-worm's sting" (4.1.16). I would like to clarify that a blind-worm, also called a slow-worm, is a type of a limbless lizard. Despite

the word worm being included, Shakespeare is specifically referring to a certain reptile. In contrast to both of these examples, when the general term worm is used, even if it is being used in reference to a particular animal, the related action is not stinging but biting or eating.

For example in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra and the Clown continually refer to the asp that kills Cleopatra as a worm. The Clown describes how a woman who was killed by the worm "died of the biting of it" (5.2.248-249). The woman was not stung by the worm but was bitten by it. Additionally, Cleopatra asks, "Will it eat me?" (266). So, why do worms bite and eat rather than sting? From the *OED*, in general to sting is "'[t]o pierce or wound with a point darted out, as that of wasps or scorpions' (Johnson). Said also of venomous serpents and some other animals which inflict sharp or poisonous wounds" ("sting, v.1" 2.a). In contrast, to consume something, an extension of biting and eating, can relate to "[s]enses relating to physical destruction" ("consume, v.1." 1). The focus of stinging is to wound something, which in turn could kill it, but consuming can destroy something. The *worm* of conscience draws attention to the destruction of being consumed.

In the Chapter One, I discussed how the body's consumption by worms after death was viewed as an act of social levelling as well as a potential disruption of metaphysical process. In this section, I want to focus on the connection that is created between the person and the worm through this act of eating. Karen Raber examines the idea of mutual consumption in relation to *Hamlet*. She suggests: "*Hamlet* is fundamentally about parasitism, the kind practiced by animals, and the kind experienced and practiced by humans – a parasitism that is based on the confusion of human and animal embodiment, realized in the play mainly through images of their shared bodily processes" (*Animal Bodies* 111). Through cycles of consumption, Hamlet acknowledges that the divide between humans and animals is

not set and is instead constantly being challenged by eating as humans eat animals that have eaten worms, thereby suggesting that humans also eat worms. For Raber, the connection between humans and animals this cycle creates is increasingly worrisome for Hamlet, as it "is inimical to the struggle to establish his existence as a unique, individuated human self" (105). In contrast, Martin Randall notes a positive result of the connection between humans and animals. Randall argues that, through the act of eating humans, worms bring humans into the natural rejuvenation of the world and thereby help to sustain the world (144). I would argue, in agreement with Raber, that Hamlet's representation of worms is more focused on the concerns about connections between humans and animals and the challenges they cause to the definition of humanity itself.

When asked where the recently murdered Polonius is, Hamlet tells Claudius that Polonius is "At supper" (4.3.18). As an explanation to his assertions, Hamlet briefly discusses the fate of all humans, which is to be eaten by worms: "Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service - two dishes, but to one table. That's the end" (21-25). Through his assertion, Hamlet describes how humans are ruled by worms. Specifically, Hamlet suggests that Claudius is ruled by a worm. Hamlet's use of "your worm" suggests Claudius has his own worm living within himself, notably a worm that guides his actions. Metaphorically, Claudius is ruled by a worm as a result of his sinful nature; Claudius has assassinated his brother and is known to be indulgent with his nightly feasts. Claudius's worm is an apt punishment for his indulgence, since worms were viewed as an appropriate punishment for gluttony (Raber, *Animal Bodies* 114). Hamlet makes the connection between Claudius's worm and his diet when he states that "Your worm is your

only emperor for diet" (4.3.21-22). In a more general way, Hamlet links worms with the act of eating through the idea of fattening. People eat in order to sustain themselves; however, whenever they die whatever 'food' has been left in their bodies becomes food for worms. Not only does overeating connect humans to worms through sin but also through a person's death. The connection between people and animals is further extended in Hamlet's next lines: "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm" (27-28). The food chain Hamlet references relates to Raber's 'mutual consumption' in which it is shown that humans eat animals that have eaten worms, which in turn means humans have eaten worms. Such a cycle of consumption becomes problematic as it breaks down important contemporary dietary restrictions for humans.

With the tension between humans and animals apparent, Hamlet's comments about the interconnection between the two categories presents a cause for concern. Not only is it problematic that Claudius has a worm because of his sinful actions, but the representation of a worm eating Claudius highlights the interconnection between humans and animals. Eating on its own was a complicated action in the Early Modern Period as people were limited in terms of what animals they could eat in order to keep their humanity. Keith Thomas notes that people would not eat animals such as cats and dogs with whom they had a close personal connection or animals that were found to have human-like qualities such as horses and certain wild birds (115-116). While not falling into either of these categories, worms were also not eaten in Early Modern England. Topsel notes: "The people of Europe in no place that euer I heard or read of, can endure [worms] to be fet on their Tables, but for medicinall vfes onely they defire them" (*Serpents* 312). Even when worms are used as medicine, Topsel describes how they may need to be cleansed before use:

> They vse to take the greateft Earth-Wormes that can bee found, and to wrappe them in Mosse, fuffering them there to remayne for a certaine time, thereby the better to purge and clenfe them from that clammy and filthy flimyneffe, which outwardly cleauth to their bodies. When all this is done, they preffe hard the hinder-part of their bodies neere to the taile, fquifing, out thereby their excrements, that no impurity fo neere as is poffible may be retayned in them. (310)

On their own, there can be harmful properties associated with worms that humans should not ingest. Humans can become corrupted if they eat worms as the human body becomes filled with the putrid and rotting material found inside a worm. By claiming that people eat worms because they eat fish, Hamlet is suggesting that people cannot distinguish themselves from animals by choosing what they eat since in reality humans do not have complete control over what they consume. Unlike a choice of how to act, whether that be piously or sinfully, people cannot avoid eating. Even if someone were to take it to the extreme of not eating so that they do not eat worms, eventually they will die and then be eaten by worms. Human life is inextricably tied to worms. No matter how far people want to distance themselves in order to establish a difference between themselves and animals, they cannot fully remove themselves. Consumption is therefore important for my examination of worms in relation to the living as it shows that people are constantly tied to worms even if they try to avoid them.

Likewise, consumption is important as it highlights the sinful nature of the body. To begin, worms of conscience appear because they show how destructive sin could be. As mentioned previously, sinners were tormented by worms in Hell which would continually gnaw on them. Following this representation, worms of conscience continually gnaw on a sinner's soul. To sin not only goes against God but it causes harm to the sinner as they will

be continually eaten and corrupted by worms. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter One and Sonnet 146, when the bodily passions overtake the needs of the soul, the soul is unable to get away from death and therefore salvation is harder to achieve. However, there is also the reality that the soul can be destructive to the body. As mentioned briefly in Chapter One, there were debates about whether the soul or the body or both was the corrupting figure that may cause the damnation of a person. One of the arguments supporting the claim that the soul corrupts the body was related to will. As Rosalie Osmond summarizes, "The fact that will, the agent ultimately responsible for action, belongs to the soul is further grounds for placing the heavier share of blame on the soul" (33). Osmond does mention that there was an opposite argument which suggested that the body "may actively tempt the soul and so itself initiate sinful action" (33). While both parts of this argument are present in relation to the worm of conscience, I would argue the main responsibility rests on the soul. As a reminder of sin, the worm of conscience becomes responsible for helping the soul control the body. Even if gluttony is driven by the body, it is the soul that must learn to control the appetite. Part of the idea relates back to the desire to separate humans and animals where the person was "taught to regard their bodily impulses as 'animal' ones, needing to be subdued" (Thomas 38). The worm of conscience therefore plays an important role in ensuring the humanity of the human; however, the concept was also problematic because it suggested that there was a worm living inside of each person.

Spontaneous Generation

The idea of worms being inside of a person was not a foreign concept during the Early Modern Period due to the idea of spontaneous generation. In his work published in

1683, Edward Tyson points out that previously people believed that worms were created out of putrefaction:

> The confideration of Insects, and their manner of generation, as it is a fubject of curious fpeculation; fo of late hath been much illuftrated by the laborious referaches of many inquifitive persons: whose tra-vels therein, tho' they have much advanced the doctrine of univocal generation; and bid very fair for the expoding of that, too easily received, and common error, of their production from putrefaction…. (113-114)

While sexual reproduction was acknowledged in some circumstances, it was commonly believed that worms reproduced through spontaneous generation, meaning they seemingly suddenly appeared since eggs were not always visible (MacInnes 255). This does not mean that worms would randomly be born in the air. Rather, it was acknowledged that everything that putrefies can become a host for worms (Bailey 222). Environment becomes important since, as highlighted by Ian MacInnes, "everything, it seems, has worms within it, or at least the potential to develop worms" (258). While this wide definition broadly extends the scope of what could be a potential host for worms; substances heavily associated with corruption such as "dew, mud, timber, hair, flesh and excrement" were thought to be more prolific hosts (255). The importance of environment also extends to worms born from eggs since they "will not hatch and grow unless the humors that surround them are amenable" (255). Since environment is an essential aspect in the development of worms, it is important to consider where worms arise. Shakespeare invokes worms in several different manners to explore various facets of corruption. As discussed, worms are depicted to discuss environmental,

personal, and spiritual corruption. Each of these types of corruption becomes apparent in the context of the worm of conscience and where the worm was born and currently resides.

Worm in the Bud

As noted throughout this brief discussion of spontaneous generation, corruption was an essential part of a worm's life cycle. In order to help his students learn Latin, John Baret released *An Alverari or Triple Dictionaire, in Englifhe, Latin, and French* (1574). Comprising hundreds of English words, Baret's work provides several examples of the way 'worm' is utilized in contemporary language. He provides the translations for different kinds of worms such as "[a] gloe worme, a gloe bearde that fhineth be night, Lampyris, pen, prod. Lampiridis, f.g. Plin" and "[a] glowe worme fhining in the night, Nitedula, lae, f.g. Cic" (section 363; 365). However, in some of his other examples, the theme of corruption is present. For one of his definitions and examples, Baret writes that worms found "in a dogges tonge [will] maketh him madde if he be not taken out" (366). This particular use of 'worm' is distinct from the other uses of worms I examine throughout this thesis as worm refers to a ligament in the dogs tongue rather than a kind of animal: "A small vermiform ligament or tendon in a dog's tongue, often cut out when the animal is young, as a supposed safeguard against rabies" (*OED* "worm, n." III.13.a). While this example diverges from my current focus on animals, the use still fits within the ideas related to worms. In this instance the worm, ligament, is inside the dog and can cause harm to the animal. Like other worms that cause illness and need to be removed to ensure the health of people and animals, this ligament must also be removed. This idea of harm and corruption associated with animal worms transfers to the ligament worm as well. The focus on corruption is also apparent in Baret's definition of ring worms: "A ringe worme running with a drie fcabbe [and] itching in

any parte of the body" (section 368). In this instance the ring worm causes harm and pain to its human host. Baret demonstrates that the term worm is associated with corruption and detrition regardless of whether the worm is a living animal or a body part of a living animal. In a more general sense, Baret notes that worms are also related to detrition: "To be rotten or worme eaten" (365). Not only does someone have worms but they are being eaten by them. In Chapter One, I discussed how worms were representative of the destructive qualities of death and dying. Baret's examples build upon this idea that worms are destructive to the living.

By considering the ideas of spontaneous generation and corruption I can begin to discuss Shakespeare's more specific depictions of worms in relation to the inward. Relating to spontaneous generation, MacInnes notes that it is "[t]he ability of worms to destroy in secret [that] was one reason their generative causes attracted so much attention" (264). Since worms could appear without a visual cue, they became connected with secretive destruction. The practice of worms eating and destroying from the inside out was often portrayed as "the worm in the bud" (264). Shakespeare portrays such an image in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. In each case the image is used to highlight the deceptive and unclear nature of a character's actions. In *As You Like It*, Celia refers to Orlando's love for Rosalind "as concave as a covered goblet or a worm-eaten nut" (3.4.22-23). Celia thinks that Orlando's words of love for Rosalind are fake and deceptive; Orlando does not love Rosalind like he says he does. Celia's doubt about the truthfulness of lovers is confirmed when she states: "the oath of a lover is no stronger than the word of a tapster. They are both the confirmer of false reckonings" (27-29). In a similar manner, *Twelfth Night* utilizes worm imagery to question what happens when people are secretive and do not reveal their true

feelings. Viola, disguised as Cesario, describes a fictional sister who never expressed her love as slowly deteriorating: “But let concealment, like a worm i'th’ bud, / Feed on her damask cheek” (2.4.111-112). Secrecy is punished as her fictional sister loses her beauty. Her face goes from healthy and blush-coloured to a “green and yellow melancholy” (113). In this instance the sister is going from healthy to ill because a figurative worm is eating her from the inside out. Secrecy, or not displaying the interior, is punished. Finally, Romeo displays a similar love-struck secrecy. At the start of the play Romeo is depressed about his unrequited love for Rosaline. Rather than express his sadness, he keeps the cause to himself. While discussing Romeo’s gloomy behaviour, Lord Montague likens Romeo’s secrecy to “the bud bit with an envious worm” (*Rom*. 1.1.148). Ideally, Lord Montague wishes his son would share the cause of his sorrow, as Lord Montague would “willingly give cure” for the worm (152). In his brief mention of *Romeo and Juliet*, MacInnes suggests that “[t]he ‘envious worm’ is an enemy of the natural development of the individual .... But it is also a product of the individual…” (264). The enemy-like nature of the worm is apparent since it infects the host, but the diseased product arises from the actions of the individual host.

The problem with the worm of conscience in revealing someone’s nature is that, since it is internal, no one can see the worm. Alanna Skuse notes that the pains inflicted by worms of conscience “were inescapable precisely because they originated inside oneself” (71). Skuse focuses on how the internality of the worm is problematic to the sinner but its inwardness is also problematic to others. Just as a worm in a bud slowly destroys the flower from within, people do not necessarily know the real intentions of their peers until a sinner has been fully consumed and destroyed by their worm and their sin. Worms of conscience remind everyone to better themselves but they cannot tell you if someone else is good. In

relation to the connection between humans and animals generally, worms in this capacity demonstrate the imperfection of humans and thereby their moral downfall. As Thomas discusses, there was a connection between sinful actions and being an animal. He quotes Oliver Cromwell as saying: "If a man's mind was not pure there was no difference between him and a beast" (36). Therefore, if someone is being eaten by a worm of conscience, it is because they have fallen to the level of an animal. They are an animal and they are being eaten by one. They are harmed in some way.

Like Viola, Lord Montague likens Romeo's secretive action to a disease which in this instance needs a cure. In each case, Shakespeare uses the image of a bud infected with a worm in order to question certain parts of a character's actions and thereby also the character themselves. The importance of the destruction coming from within relates back to the truthfulness of the inward. During the Early Modern Period, dissections became an important method to analyze and research human anatomy: the human interior. The body would be used as evidence to prove the true nature of a person and to provide a visible representation of the soul: "In a fashion ambiguously poised between the metaphoric and the literal, the interior of the body was imagined as inscribed with the occult truths of the inner self. Thus, in the exemplary openings of the body that crowned the execution of traitors, the victim's heart would be displayed as the sign and proof of his hidden wickedness…" (Neill 123). In the cases of Romeo and Viola's sister, their deteriorating outward appearance is their truthful inward nature slowly revealing itself to the outside world. In this way the worm reminds the individual that something is wrong, but also reveals their inward nature to the rest of the world.

It is important that someone's deceptive and harmful nature be revealed to others as the concealment of someone's true feelings may harm others. While Plato acknowledges an imitator may not intentionally try to cause harm, those who imitate the imitator may assume the imitation is acceptable. As an example, Plato suggests that someone who watches a comedian and enjoys a comedian's improper jokes may begin to tell such jokes even if originally they would not have: "For the element in you that wanted to tell the jokes, but which you held back by means of reason because you were afraid of being reputed a buffoon, you now release; and having made it strong in that way, you have been led unaware into becoming a comedian in your own life" (311). The comedian may not have intended for the regular person to begin acting improperly, but as people will imitate the exterior this is what happens. This inherent problem with imitation extends to the idea of worms of conscience as the improper actions may extend to committing sins and harming the soul:

> And in the case of sexual desires, anger, and all the appetites, pains, and pleasures in the soul, which we say accompany every action of ours, the effect of poetic imitation on us is the same. I mean, it nurtures and waters them when they should be dried up, and establishes them as rulers in us when – if we are to be become better and happier rather than worse and more wretched – they should be ruled. (311)

Even if a person wishes to be pious, they may be led astray by the fake exterior of their peers. The gradual manifestation of the effects of Romeo's and Viola's sister's worms reveals to their peers that these characters have a false exterior that should not be imitated. The worm of conscience serves not only each individual to help them live piously, but helps society eliminate any threats.

Timon of Athens

While I have currently focused on the individual's relationship between themselves and their worm of conscience, Shakespeare also invokes the worm to highlight corruption of the environment. In *Timon of Athens*, Timon discusses the corrupted nature of nature. After leaving Athens, bankrupted and friendless, he describes the earth as a mother that births all sorts of vermin, including people:

> Common mother – thou
> Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast
> Teems and feeds all, whose selfsame mettle
> Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man, is puffed
> Engenders the black toad and adder blue,
> The gilded newt and eyeless venomed worm,
> With all the abhorrèd births below crisp heaven…. (4.3.181-184)

In this instance Timon highlights the corrupted nature of the world through the creatures it births. In *Imperfect Creatures*, Lucinda Cole quotes Goodfrey Goodman who describes how the character of what the world creates teaches us about the environment:

> Goodman distinguishes between creatures created by God and the ephemeral offspring of a corrupted nature: if nature were "sound and entire," he reasons, she would have given vermin 'a more noble birth, and a longer continuance of life; but being defectiue, and not able to produce couragious Lions, braue Vnico[rn]es, fierce Tigers, stout Elephants, shee makes it her taske and imployment to be the mother, and mid- wife of wormes, of gnats, and of butterflies, wherein she seemes most to abound, and to bring forth a very plentifull brood.' (74)

Goodman extends the idea that worms are born from putrid and corrupted things. Since Timon's environment produces "abhorred births," it itself must be corrupted. In the play, the character's outward actions highlight Athens's internal corruption. The inclusion of "arrogant man" in the list of corrupted nature's children is significant as it suggests that people are just as corrupted as vermin. This idea is highlighted by Timon who refers to his 'friends' as "detested parasites, / Courteous destroyers" (3.7.93-94). Just as worms eat and destroy things, so do the Athenians.

Timon's connection between worms and people highlights the harm that people cause to the state. Timon remarks: "Breath infect breath, / That their society, as their friendship, may / Be merely poison!" (4.1.30-32). The infectious nature of the Athenians spreads to all of Athens until all those who are causing the infection must kill themselves and thereby remove the corruption:

> TIMON. Tell Athens, in the sequence of degree
> From high to low throughout, that whoso please
> To stop affliction, let him take his haste,
> Come hither ere my tree hath felt the axe,
> And hang himself. I pray you, do my greeting. (5.2.93-97)

Worms themselves are not the corrupting force but simply demonstrate that something is already rotten. Like a worm that must be removed in order to re-establish health, so must the Athenians who are corrupting and damaging Athens be removed. This idea of worms as signifiers of rottenness is not limited to the general population but also can be narrowed to specific individuals.

Macbeth

As already mentioned, the generation of worms relates to the environment. If conditions were not ideal then the worms could not be born. Combining this idea with MacInnes' observation that a worm's "ability to grow secretly within an otherwise healthy body … makes them appropriate vehicles for political ills" (255), I will discuss the harm inflicted by corrupt rulers. Many of the facets of worm-related corruption are present in *Macbeth*. In order to secure his new status as King, Macbeth attempts to have a number of his rivals killed. While Banquo is successfully murdered, Fleance escapes. For Macbeth, Fleance is problematic as he is a threat to Macbeth's power: "The worm that's fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed…" (3.4.28-29). In this particular instance, Shakespeare references 'worm' as a substitute for 'serpent' and is suggesting that, given time, Fleance will take the place of Banquo, "the grown serpent [who now] lies" (28). While Macbeth suggests Fleance will become a greater threat in the future, he still harms Macbeth in the present:

> Then comes my fit again; I had else been perfect,
> Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
> As broad and general as the casing air,
> But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
> To saucy doubts and fears…. (20-24)

Had both murders gone as planned, Macbeth believes, perhaps incorrectly, he would have been whole and stable or "perfect." In essence, Macbeth would not have to worry about being infected or imperfect since the only potentially corrupting worm is gone. However, since the threat remains, Macbeth has been crippled. Rather than spreading his power and

reach, he has been confined and is limited to attempting to maintain his power. Even without venom, "the worm" is destroying Macbeth's power.

Currently, Fleance is hindering Macbeth in a similar way to the concept of a worm of conscience. Macbeth does not want to extend his reach because he is worried about what will eventually happen with Fleance. Fleance's presence is a reminder of all the sins and murders Macbeth has committed to gain his crown. Cole suggests that, once Macbeth kills Duncan, Macbeth's status as a host of corruption is established: "After he murders Duncan, Macbeth becomes linked metaphorically to witches, vermin, and other creatures of putrefaction: 'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!' (3.2.59). If scorpions breed spontaneously from putrefaction, Macbeth is now the origin and incubator of his own putrefying sin" (Cole 37). Fleance is simply a reminder of this reality. The fact that Fleance can grow more venomous and destructive suggests that there is a political environment that can 'breed' worms. MacInnes mentions how the concept of spontaneous generation of worms was related to national corruption: "Yet because of their ties to specific climates, they could be taken as evidence of corruption occurring at a national level as well" (258). Since a worm can breed in the environment of Macbeth's reign, this reign itself is inherently corrupt. Without even raising a rebellion, Fleance and his potential uprising represent the fragile nature of Macbeth's power. Fleance also highlights how the potential future presence of worms is equally as threatening as worms that are currently present. As described by King Henry VI, "Civil dissension is a viperous worm / That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth" (*1H6* 3.1.73-74). A revolt may not have happened yet, but the presence of a politically created worm can be just as destructive. Just as a worm can remind a person that they are sinning, society can engender its own worm that reminds people there is something inherently wrong

and something that must be changed. Altogether, *Macbeth* shows the pervasive nature of worms. In this scene worms have not only infected Macbeth, but also the entire nation. Despite his best efforts, Macbeth finds it difficult to kill all the worms in his court. Even when one worm dies, another can grow and take the first one's place since Macbeth himself is corrupted. Macbeth is surrounded and destroyed by the worms he has created.

Richard III

In *Richard III*, the growth of the corruption, represented by the worm of conscience, continues to spread until the only way to get rid of the worm is via the death of the individual host. In *Richard III*, Queen Margaret curses Richard and comments: "The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul" (1.3.219). Queen Margret's invocation of a worm serves to remind the audience about Richard's intentions. To have a worm of conscience eating his soul means Richard is sinning and his actions are not those of a righteous person. While Richard could take the sensation and Margret's accusation as a catalyst to change, repent, and become a pious man, he does not. Instead Richard continues with his current sinful life, murdering anyone who gets in the way of his effort to become King. In this instance, Richard's worm not only shows that he is a sinner but also that he remains "determined to prove a villain" (1.1.30), since he chooses to ignore it. Worms show the nature of a character and their true intentions. Even if Richard will keep his true ambitions hidden and "seem a saint when most [he] play the devil" (1.3.398), the presence of the worm reveals the truth. Before the final battle Richard is visited by the ghosts of everyone he has murdered, and several of them state that they will "sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow" (5.5.71; 85; 93). Upon awaking, Richard refers to his conscience as a "coward" (133) for having these guilty thoughts, but at the end of the speech acknowledges it is not his conscience that has failed

him but himself: “And if I die, no soul shall pity me. / Nay, wherefore should they? - Since that I myself / Find in myself no pity to myself” (155-157). Richard realizes that his faults are his own and that he has been lying to himself: “I am a villain. Yet I lie. I am not” (145). Since the worm of conscience is unable to make Richard change and thereby heal the state, the world around Richard as represented by the ghosts of everyone he has killed does so. Richard himself acknowledges it is the visit from the ghosts that scares him the most:

> By the apostle Paul, shadows tonight
> Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
> Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
> Armèd in proof and led by shallow Richmond. (170-173)

Where Richard’s conscience has failed, the world around him succeeds in causing him to doubt his actions. However, Richard’s realization comes too late as the ghosts who have haunted him have fully shown his crimes to Richmond and have shown support for Richmond’s victory: “Methought their souls whose bodies Richard murdered / Came to my tent and cried on victory” (184-185). Richmond’s victory is important as it allows England to heal: “We will unite the white rose and the red. / Smile, heaven, upon this fair conjunction, / That long have frowned upon their enmity” (5.7.19-21). In *Richard III*, the worm of conscience has failed its initial purpose of saving Richard’s soul and shows that, when the conscience fails, it is the larger world that has to ensure that corruption is eliminated. The presence of the worm highlights when there is something damaging the larger world that must be removed.

Conclusion

With the end of this chapter I mark the end of my examination of the destructive nature of worms. In the last two chapters I have discussed how worms acted as a threat to human constructions surrounding nature and human superiority during the Early Modern Period. Throughout their lives humans are intimately tied with worms. People inevitably eat worms, they may easily be infected by worms, and in the end they are all eaten by worms. While humans can do their best to not become infested by worms, they cannot avoid all interconnections with worms. Humans are constantly reminded of their closeness to animals through the presence of worms and, even worse, are reminded that they do not have complete control over worms. Corruption and worms are closely linked and, as has been mentioned, the type of corruption can be categorized in a number of different ways. Worms may show the corruption of nature, a nation, and or an individual's intentions or actions. Through corruption, worms may remind people of the necessity to live honest lives. However, throughout the different instances examined in this chapter it becomes apparent that worms are often ignored until the corruption worms represent spreads, thereby infecting others. In this way, worms in relation to living bodies demonstrate the destruction corrupted people can do to society.

Chapter Three

"Joy o' the Worm:" Reunion

In the *Aberdeen Bestiary* (c. 1200), the anonymous author explains that when a phoenix dies it is reborn and grows from its remains: "when its time is come, it enters the covering and dies. From the fluid of its flesh a worm arises and gradually grows to maturity; when the appropriate time has come, it acquires wings to fly, and regains its Previous appearance and form" (Folio 56r). It may seem counterintuitive to continue discussing worms in a description of the phoenix's lifecycle, but its birth serves as an ideal representation to begin the discussion of reunion. In the Phoenix section the author explains that phoenixes are born from worms that develop from the bird's rotting remains. As discussed in the previous chapter, this idea of generation is not unique, as different kinds of worms were thought to spontaneously generate from different kinds of objects or animals. In relation to the phoenix and rebirth, the *Aberdeen Bestiary* also tells us how bees are born from worms: "To produce them, you beat the flesh of dead calves, so that worms come forth from the putrefying blood; these later become bees" (Folio 63r). In both cases the worm is produced as a result of something dying. Specifically, in relation to the phoenix, their birth from death is instructional:

> Let this bird teach us, therefore, by its own example to believe in the resurrection of the body; lacking both an example to follow and any sense of reason, it reinvests itself with the very signs of resurrection, showing without doubt that birds exist as an example to man, not man as an example to the birds. Let it be, therefore, an example to us that as the maker and creator of birds does not suffer his saints to to [*sic*] perish forever, he wishes the bird, rising again, to be restored with its own seed. Who, but

> he, tells the phoenix that the day of its death has come, in order that it might make its covering, fill it with perfumes, enter it and die there, where the stench of death can be banished by sweet aromas? (Folio 56r- Folio 56v)

In this section, the author suggests there are two lessons we can learn from the phoenix. First, the body is restored after death, and second, there is a new life to be found after death. These lessons relate to the idea that after a human's death, their body and soul separate until both are reunited at the time of Resurrection. The author highlights and reminds the reader that death does not mean the end of life, but the beginning of a new one which, for a phoenix, begins with a worm.

As discussed in the previous chapters, Shakespeare commonly invokes worms to reflect upon the connection between humans and worms and the destruction these interactions represent. While worms in Shakespeare's plays may be used as potential figures for redemption such as in the case of the worm of conscience, in general worms were used to discuss the corruption present in both bodies and souls. The presence of worms meant that something, whether it be people, the environment, or metaphysical processes, was corrupted and functioning incorrectly. In Chapter One I discussed these destructive qualities in relation to the body and in Chapter Two I examined in relation to the soul. In this chapter the body and the soul will be reunited in order to explore the potential rejuvenation or new life that could be created. Romeo, Cleopatra, and Constance all invoke worms in their journey to start anew and escape their current circumstances. As will be discussed, when each of these characters refers to worms, worms are not just representative of fear. Rather they become agents of hope. However, all of the characters do not view hope in the same way. Nor do they all view the reunion of the body and soul as the only means for a new life. Romeo

desires Juliet and, since worms 'live' with her, Romeo accepts them. Cleopatra wants to die, and worms provide the method. Constance wants to join and become like death, and worms are part of her desired transformation. None of these plays dismisses the connection between worms and death, but none focuses on ideas of harmful destruction of identity or corruption because that wormy characteristic is not the focus. Instead the metaphorical association between worms and death symbolically highlights the achievement of a goal. Worms may not allow each character to regenerate, but they connote the start of a transformation from what was to what could be.

An Animal's Purpose

During the Early Modern Period the usefulness of animals to people was critical. Keith Thomas notes that, at the time, an important part of the classification of animals was based upon "their utility to man, and their value as food and medicine and as moral symbols" (53). All of these aspects relate to the overarching belief that all animals were "intended to serve some human purpose, if not practical, then moral or aesthetic" (19). The desire to ensure that all animals maintain a purpose for people relates back to the Bible and the assertion that animals are alive to serve humans: "And God faid, Let vs make man in our Image, after our likeneffe: and let them haue dominion ouer the fifh of the fea, and ouer the foule of the aire, and ouer the cattell, and ouer all the earth, and ouer euery creeping thing that creepeth vpon the earth" (Gen. 1.26). In a broad sense, animals were biblically defined as creatures that were subservient to people. It is therefore vital for worms to remain in their place and in a state of submission to ensure that the distinction between people and animals remains intact. If an animal is on the same level or even in a state of dominance over people,

then the animal goes against biblical definitions and the binary opposition between humans and animals begins to erode.

The way humans use certain animals alters how an animal is perceived. For example, Kate Soper discusses how pigs were both disowned and viewed with endearment for certain "piggish" features. First, pigs were perceived as greedy and filthy as a result of how they ate and lived. Despite these flaws, due to their capacity to eat garbage, pigs served as a "primitive form of sewage and refuse disposal" as well as being "an extremely economic source of meat" (87). In both negative and positive perceptions, how the human and the pig interact is significant. The pig's greedy nature arises from people feeding the pig "inordinately on garbage to make it fat" and it is filthy because "it is kept in sty" (Berger qtd. in Soper 87). Due to the service pigs provide to people - eating lots of garbage - they are helpful. Yet the type of service and how the job is accomplished causes pigs to be associated with negative characteristics. Therefore, the type of service and how that service is completed dictates how the animal is depicted by humans.

A Worm's Purpose

Despite their connection with corruption and death, worms were seen in certain circumstances as useful and valuable to people. For example, in his "Of Earthworms" section, Edward Topsel notes several ways humans could use earthworms. For instance, people used them as a way to forecast the weather: "Earth-Wormes doe alfo much good to men, feruing them to great vfe in that they do prognofticate and fore-tell rainy weather by their fodaine breaking or iffuing forth of the ground: and if none appeare aboue ground ouer-night, it is a great figne it will be calme and fayre weather the next day" (*Serpents* 312). Earthworms were also used as bait for fishing: "Of this fort fome are red, (which Englifhmen

call Dogs) and thefe by they that Anglers and Fifhers do fo much defire, for Fifhes will greddily devour them, and for that end they with them do bait their hooks" (*Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* 811-812). Additionally, worms were used in metal work to help strengthen iron: "They take of Earth-Wormes two parts, of Faddifh-roots one part, after they are bruised together, the water is put into a Limbecke to be diftilled, or elfe take of the diftilled water of Wormes, l.iij. of the juyce of Raddifh, i.j. mixe them together, for Iron being often quenched in this water, will grow exceeding hard" (*Serpents* 312). In all of these examples Topsel describes important usages of earthworms whereby they become beneficial for people. The connection between worms and health was more complicated.

In the Early Modern Period, worms could be used as medicine for various ailments. For instance, Topsel notes that earthworms can help to treat illnesses such as diabetes, toothaches, and broken bones (*Serpents* 310-311). In order to treat these and other illnesses, worms, of various varieties, could be used in a number of ways. As described by Thomas Muffet, laying a worm on a breast was thought to cure inflammation: "Inflamations of the breafts, Earth-worms alone laid on will cure, for they concod, open, draw forth, and heal" (1105). Likewise, worms could be taken by mouth to help with tumors: "They alfo diminifh the Stone, both taken inwardly, as alfo anointed on the fhare fomewhat thick" (1105). Worms were therefore an important part of medical treatments during the period.

Despite their use as medicine, worms were also problematic as they caused both animals and people to become ill. A worm could hinder an ox's ability to eat (Topsel, *Four-Footed Beafts* 81), and children who had round worms presented a number of different symptoms:

> [They] are cruelly torn in their bellies and guts; and they have a tickling cough that is troubleforae, and fomewhat tedious, fome have a hickop, others when they fleep leap up, and rife without caufe ; fometimes they cry out when they rife, and then they fall afleep again ; their Arteries beat unequally, and they are fick of diforderly Feavers, which with coldnefs of the outward parts come thrice or four times in a day or a night without any reafon for them. (Muffet 1111)

Having worms was a common occurrence; Muffet in *Of the Theatre of Insects* dedicates an entire section to cures for people,[13] and Topsel mentions many cures for both people and animals in his *Historie of Four-Footed Beasts.*[14]

Due to worm's pervasiveness, finding treatments for worms was essential for both animal and human health. As an example, while presented as a treatment for cancer, which was often represented as a worm, the passage below describes taking worms to remove worms:

> A Certain Emperick did help many cancers, in divers people (that were troubled with them) after this manner. He took certain worms, called in latine Centumpedes, in english sows: they are such as lie under old timber, or between the bark and the trees. These he stamped, and strained with ale, and gave the patient to drink thereof morning and evening. This medicine caused many times a certain black bug, or worm to come forth which had many legs, and was quick, and after that the cancer would heal quickly with any convenient medicine. (Border qtd in Skuse 107)

Similarly, if an animal was sick from a worm, one of the remedies was to directly feed the animal an earthworm:

> Pelagonius much commendeth Earth-Wormes as an excellent Medicine for the bots or Worms that are in Horfes, and in the bodies of Oxen and Kine, affirming that the beft way is to put them alive into their Noftrils, although without queftion it were farre better to conueigh them into their maws by the means of fome horne. (Topsel, *Serpents* 311)

While the consumption of worms as medicine challenges Topsel's assertion that people in Early Modern England did not consume worms (*Serpents* 312), worms were eaten as medicine due to a "[b]elief in the efficacy of 'like against like'…" (Skuse 107). Worms were essential in treating aliments caused by worms as they were the most effective treatment. The ability of worms to treat people was viewed as especially important, as healing people was among the most significant things a worm could do:

> But although this famous Pooet doth fo much feem to extenuate and debafe a weak Worm: yet others have left us in their writings fuch commendations of their fingular ufe and neceffity, for the recovery of mans health (then which no earthly thing is more pretious) and have fo nobilitated the worth of thefe poor contemptible Creatures, as I think, nature as yet hath fcarfe given any other fimple Medicine, nor knowledge of plants by long ftudy hath revealed…. (Topsel, *Beasts and Serpents* 813)

The use of worms as medicine can be viewed as part of a worm's job in the world. They provide a cure that no other medicine can.

As has been discussed, worms were useful in various aspects of Early Modern life. In his works, Shakespeare also includes some references to beneficial worm characteristics. Shakespeare mentions 'glow-worm' three times in relation to usefulness and associates it

with light. In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania instructs the fairies to light candles for Bottom with "the fiery glow-worm's eyes" (3.1.162), and Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* describes glow-worms as lanterns: "And twenty glow-worms shall our lanterns be…" (5.5.77). In these instances, it is their physical properties that make glow-worms useful for people. Finally, the Ghost in *Hamlet* associates morning with glow-worms: "The glow-worm shows the matin to be near…" (1.5.89). The glow-worm helps the Ghost tell time simply because of when the glow-worm is awake. In each instance, the use of a worm is mentioned but there is no discussion of compensation for the worm's work. In *King Lear*, Lear comments that people owe animals nothing: "Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume" (F.3.4.97-99). While mentioning a specific usage of silk-worms, making silk, he also highlights the idea that this activity is part of a worm's purpose. The lack of compensation arises as it is a worm's general purpose, along with all other animals, to serve humans: "In Tudor and Stuart England the long-established view was that the world had been created for man's sake and that other species were meant to be subordinate to his wishes and needs" (Thomas 17). Humans do not need to compensate the silk-worm, or any animals, for their work since the worm is supposed to serve and provide for humans and is part of the silk-worm's nature.

Both the contemporary and Shakespearian examples discussed here demonstrate how particular characteristics of worms are mandatory for them to serve any purpose for people. However, despite Topsel's assertion that the best use of a worm is as medicine, it is vital not to ignore the main ideas and connotations associated with worms. In general, a worm's wormy characteristics include intrusiveness and ubiquity. Worms are everywhere and eat everyone and everything without discrimination. These characteristics help a worm achieve

its main purpose of literally decomposing all living things and figuratively representing the journey from life to death. Generally, as discussed in the previous chapters, while this purpose is not viewed as a good thing, occasionally it is. In this rest of this chapter I will examine the final scenes of Romeo, Cleopatra, and Constance where each character discusses their desire to die, and through their deaths, to be associated with worms. While each play views death and by extension invokes worms differently, each play demonstrates how the presentation of animals is constructed and affects the particular circumstances that surround each interaction between human and worm.

Transcendence

For this chapter the relationship between bodies and souls is important. While I have mentioned certain aspects of the general relationship between body and soul as understood during the period, it is necessary to briefly bring those ideas together. As mentioned, previously there was theoretical debate about whether the body causes the soul to sin, whether the soul causes the body to sin, or whether both are subject to sin. In the first chapter I looked at how the corruptibility of the body could have lasting effects on the soul. Taken to an extreme the corruptibility of the body could hinder the soul's ability to completely separate itself from the body at death. The inability of body and soul to separate is problematic, since the only way the body and soul could completely shed corruptibility was to separate and then come back together at the time of Resurrection, when "the glorified but still physical body, united to their perfected soul, will return man to his original [pre-Fall] perfection" (Osmond 14). Therefore, to prevent the separation and reunification of body and soul was to inhibit a person's salvation. In Chapter Two, I shifted my focus to look at the corruptibility of the soul and the damage it could cause. While my focus was not on the direct

impact of soul on body I did discuss how, if the soul's corruption was not addressed, it became damaging to the external body and the environment. In both Chapters One and Two, the worm was important as its consumption of either the body or soul emphasized the corruption and deterioration occurring within the individual. With this chapter, I am going to momentarily reunite the body and soul so I can closely examine the separation that occurs at the time of death and the role of the worm in bringing or representing transcendence.

Romeo

In *Romeo and Juliet*, worms act as companions to the body, signaling Romeo's reunion with Juliet rather than with just his own soul.[15] The representation of Juliet throughout the play is important as her presence alters Romeo's perception of death. Romeo does not romanticize the figure of death, going so far as to describe it as a "lean abhorrèd monster" (5.3.104). Partly, Romeo despises death because he believes death is separating him from Juliet. In a similar way to the feud that encompasses all of Verona and attempts to keep the two lovers separate, death accomplishes the same thing. Romeo's final goal is not just to die, but rather to rejoin Juliet and circumvent all those forces that are keeping him from her. As described by Marlena Tronicke, the only way for Romeo to achieve this goal is through death: "They are denied a happy life as husband and wife, and, thus, only suicide can bring them together. It is their only way out of eternal separation" (41). In order for Romeo to accomplish this goal he thinks that he must die as he believes that Juliet cannot be revived from her apparent death:

> ROMEO. … Shall I believe
>
> That unsusbstantial death is amorous,
>
> And that the lean abhorrèd monster keeps

Thee here in dark to be his paramour?

For fear of that I still will stay with thee,

And never from this pallet of dim night

Depart again…. (5.3.102-108)

What is important in this scene is the similarity between the necessary separation of body and soul for eternal salvation and the separation of Romeo from the living world. Romeo believes that in order for there to be an eventual reunion and new happier life with Juliet he must die. The importance of Romeo focusing on his reunion with Juliet rather than his own soul is that Juliet begins to represent a figurative soul while Romeo represents the physical body left behind.

Romeo's desire to be with Juliet stems from an ongoing theme in the play where light is found in darkness and darkness is found in light, a motif that includes life being found in death. When Romeo is banished from Verona, he describes his punishment as a death:

Hence-banishèd is banished from the world,

And world's exile is death. Then banishèd,

Is death mistermed. Calling death 'banishèd',

Thou cutt'st my head off with a golden axe,

And smilest upon the stroke that murders me. (3.3.19-23)

Even though the Prince has not ordered Romeo's death, for Romeo his punishment is equivalent. In part, the equivalence of death and banishment stems from Romeo's perception that "There is no world without Verona walls" (17) since "Heaven is here / Where Juliet lives…" (29-30). The connection between Juliet and Heaven is part of a larger pattern in

which Juliet represents the life side of the life/death dichotomy; she brings light into the darkness.

Early in the play, Lord Capulet, Juliet's father, comments on the hope that Juliet provides to him: "Earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she; / She's the hopeful lady of my earth" (1.2.14-15). For Lord Capulet it is the physical world that destroys him. Earth, like worms consuming a body after death, slowly consumes him, destroying part of his individuality: his personal hopes. However, as Lord Capulet comments, Juliet is able to provide some hope to this dismal situation. Her symbolic ability is further emphasized a few lines later when Lord Capulet refers to "Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light" (25). While Lord Capulet is suggesting that all the ladies at his party will help to make the world a brighter place, it is important to remember that Juliet is Lord Capulet's "hopeful lady." It is not all the stars in the world but rather just the one that makes Lord Capulet's world a better place. Since Juliet has been established as Lord Capulet's one hope, his star, I can draw a parallel between Juliet, who is living on Earth, and the stars that make the world light. Juliet, simply by being herself, is able to lighten the world. Romeo later emphasizes this ability: "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (2.1.46). For Romeo, Juliet metaphorically makes the sun shine even when it is the middle of night. Her ability to brighten the world extends to other objects and, through her presence, she is able to transform their representation. Juliet represents the soul that has already transcended to heaven and is free from the pain and torments of the physical world.

Since Juliet figuratively represents the purified soul, she acts as a reminder of the benefits of dying and escaping the world. Juliet's influence is notable in Romeo's description of the Capulet tomb. At first Romeo describes it as "detestable" and a "womb of death"

(5.3.45). In contrast to this bleak image, Romeo presents the tomb in a positive way less than 40 lines later when discussing the burial of Paris's body:

> ROMEO. I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave.
>
> A grave – O no, a lantern, slaughtered youth;
>
> For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
>
> This vault a feasting presence full of light. (83-86)

Here the tomb is "triumphant" rather than "detestable." Why does this change in description and imagery occur? The biggest difference between these two sections is Juliet. As Romeo points out, the inclusion of Juliet in the tomb makes it full of light rather than just darkness. Juliet represents the salvation that he wishes to obtain. The importance of worms in this representation of Juliet is evident in the idea of "feasting."

As discussed numerous times, worms were associated with consumption and eating in Early Modern culture. While Romeo does not directly mention worms in the previous lines, he does mention that there will be eating occurring in the tomb. As there is no indication that any of the characters will be doing the eating, it is reasonable to assume that Romeo is referring to the feast that worms will have on all of the dead bodies within the tomb. Such a feast becomes associated with light and hope as the worms represent the importance of the body dying and being eaten by worms. Additionally, as David Cressy reminds us, once a body was buried it was not to be disturbed: "Once buried, a body could not be exhumed without official permission. On the road to decomposition, and patiently awaiting the general resurrection, it belongs to no one" (389). For my current purposes, Cressy's observation highlights the importance of decomposition. The body must decompose before it can be reunited with the soul. This idea is similar to the phoenix that must die and decompose so

that a worm can grow into the new phoenix which is born "[f]rom the fluid of its flesh" (*Aberdeen Bestiary* Folio 56r). Being eaten by worms must happen for a new life to begin.

Romeo acknowledges the importance of worms on the road to his reunion when he says he will "remain / With worms that are thy chambermaids" (5.3.108-109). Just like the tomb, worms have become connected to Juliet as her chambermaids and therefore their destructive qualities have been revised as beneficial. A significant influence on Romeo's view and presentation of death and worms relates to his perception of Juliet's supposed death. As discussed in Chapter One, during the Early Modern Period, there were guidelines about how to die well and what constituted dying poorly. Despite these guides, the final decision about whether someone died well or badly was dictated by how others perceived and presented the death:

> Whilst anxiety over female speech was always a factor in Early Modern accounts of dying, the failure to speak piously and appropriately from the deathbed could be 'glossed over' by the assertion that the woman had already turned towards heaven and away from those awaiting her last words from the deathbed. Similarly, a long illness, heralded by some as a sign that an unrepentant soul was trapped within the body, could also be shown in a positive light. (Becker 70)

With regard to Juliet's first death, Romeo desires to view it positively despite being unaware of the details surrounding her death. Romeo wants to be able to find some meaning from Juliet's death:

> Death, lie thou there, by a dead man interred.
> Have they merry, which their keepers call
> A light'ning before death. O, how may I

Call this a light'ning? (5.3.87-91)

As part of Romeo's attempt to reconcile himself to Juliet's death, Romeo separates Juliet and death. After finding her, Romeo notes how her body has not been corrupted:

… O my love, my wife,

Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath,

Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.

Thou art not conquered; beauty's ensign yet

Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,

And death's pale flag is not advanced there. (5.3.91-96)

The audience is aware that Juliet still has life-like features since she is not actually dead, but Romeo's focus on these details is part of his commitment to the idea of her ability to make things better than they originally were. In the play it has been established that Juliet's ability to transform dark to light extends to the perception of animals. Romeo describes how Juliet can raise animals so high that they can make it to heaven:

ROMEO. Heaven is here

Where Juliet lives; and every cat and dog

And little mouse, every unworthy thing.

Live here in heaven and may look on her,

But Romeo may not. (3.3.29-33)

As noted by Thomas, as part of the difference between humans and animals, humans "had an immortal soul, whereas beasts perished and were incapable of an afterlife" (32). In contrast to this belief, Juliet's presence has allowed animals to transcend to heaven. Simply being around Juliet is enough to raise something so far upward that they enter a place that would

normally be closed to them. Since animals are able to reach Heaven, they can serve as a way for Romeo to get there too.

The importance of the connection between worms and heaven and thereby a new life is emphasized by Romeo's assertion that he will *remain* with worms. As mentioned in Chapter Two, worms were believed to be born from the putrefaction of different matter and as summarized by Ian MacInnes, "[a]ll bodies can putrefy; therefore all bodies can produce worms" (256). Since everyone dies and their body decomposes and putrefies, everyone at some point is engulfed by worms until their body is restored. Romeo is highlighting that his death will forever entwine him with worms. The idea that Romeo will forever remain with worms can be viewed as a contradiction to the idea that eventually the human body will separate from worms to reunite with the soul. However, I would suggest, Romeo is not concerned with moving on because he is already reuniting with Juliet who is a soul that removes the darkness from the world. Even in the play as a whole, it is Juliet's final act of suicide that restores balance to Verona and removes the darkness of the family feud:

> PRINCE. See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
> That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love;
> And I for winking at your discords, too,
> Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished. (5.3.292-295)

In his speech, the Prince presents a specific way of interpreting Romeo and Juliet's deaths. Similar to Romeo, who only focuses on the potentially positive aspects of Juliet's first death, the Prince ignores the manner of Romeo and Juliet's deaths. Lucinda Becker notes how the presentation of good deaths was based upon the external circumstances: "The same pressures that initiated records of good deaths (such as the needs of the families, financial gain and

patronage, religious inspiration and instruction) might also lead to the editing of an account of a death so as to place it in as favourable a light as possible" (71). For the Prince, it is vital that the potential legal repercussions of committing suicide are ignored in favour of reestablishing peace. The Prince suggests that it is Heaven-ordained that both Romeo and Juliet must die, and from their deaths *everyone* has been punished so that there is no more reason for revenge killings to occur. By killing herself, Juliet assures that the lovers' deaths become a tragedy that sparks the reunification of the Capulets and the Montagues. Verona is released from the corruption and destruction that had enveloped it. Without Juliet's death, Romeo's suicide could be interpreted as simply the actions of a love-struck fool. In order for Romeo's death to be a meaningful death, it has to include Juliet's death. Juliet becomes worm-like as her presence marks the start of a new life for Verona just as the worm marks a new life for the phoenix. Worms then serve as the figure that highlights the reunification of Romeo and Juliet, of body and soul, a reunion that allows for a new better life for Romeo and Juliet and for all of Verona.

Cleopatra

In *Antony and Cleopatra* it is not just associations that influence the presentation of worms, but it is rather the focus and bias of the viewer that changes perceptions. At the end of the play, Cleopatra is facing a life without Antony and more importantly a future as Caesar's political conquest. In order to escape, Cleopatra has a peasant smuggle an asp to her and uses it to kill herself. Despite the play's acknowledgment that an asp is used, Cleopatra refers to it as the "pretty little worm / of the Nilus" (5.2.238-239). Cleopatra's relationship with the worm is similar to Romeo's as she views the worm as a way to begin a better life, but Cleopatra's presentation of the worm is ultimately different. Romeo views the worms as

a sign that he has achieved transcendence, whereas Cleopatra uses the worm as a means to escape the world. Cleopatra's view of the worm is similar to those expressed in Chapter One where worms were viewed as a way to die; but, for Cleopatra, the worm represents a meaningful death rather than a destructive one. The change in perception occurs since the worm has the ability to allow Cleopatra to achieve her primary goal of escaping her circumstances. Cleopatra's escape is different from Romeo's, as Romeo focuses on the purification that occurs when body and soul are reunited, and Cleopatra focuses on the escape from the world that death grants.

Before her death, Cleopatra is being held at the behest of Caesar. Despite what Caesar initially tells Cleopatra, his aim is to flaunt Cleopatra through Rome as a political conquest, "for her life in Rome / Would be eternal triumph" (5.1.65-66). Such an act is politically detrimental for Cleopatra. As Irene Dash describes, "Political power means the right to function as more than a decoration" (229). If Cleopatra becomes simply an object for Caesar to display, then she has lost all of her power. However, if Cleopatra regains some control and becomes more than a "decoration," she will regain some of her power as she will have agency over her actions. When discussing what would happen if Cleopatra did kill herself, Caesar notes that precautions must be taken "Lest in her greatness, by some mortal stroke, / She do defeat us" (5.1.64-65). If Cleopatra dies, Caesar will not be able to use Cleopatra as a spoil of war and flaunt her around Rome to show his political dominance over her. She will have beaten Caesar. Cleopatra herself notes that she will gain her own political advantage through her death:

> Methinks I hear
>
> Antony call. I see him rouse himself

To praise my noble act. I hear him mock

The luck of Caesar…. (5.2.278-281)

Cleopatra notes that she will be able to mock Caesar through her death, suggesting that she is able to ruin Caesar's plan through her "noble act" of suicide. Through death, she can regain who she is without Caesar's influence. Cleopatra's personally perceived ability to regain her own political power through her death is apparent from her exclamation: "Husband, I come. / Now to that name my courage prove my title" (5.2.282-283). Cleopatra is proclaiming that because she has the courage to kill herself, her title of Queen has been reconfirmed. To ensure there is no question about her title, she dons the robes and crown of royalty shortly before these lines. She is a Queen regardless of anyone else's definition. Cleopatra's death is therefore meaningful, unlike Mercutio's, as "death becomes an occasion for triumphant self-definition" (Neill 313). Like Arthur Droge and James Tabor's more general explanation for justifiable suicide, there is "*sufficient justification*" for Cleopatra to kill herself and have it be a "*noble* choice" (187; emphasis original).

Cleopatra is able to rebuild her life through death since death marks the start of a new life. As described by Enobarbus following Fulvia's death, death is similar to gaining new robes: "When it pleaseth their deities to take the wife of a man from him, it shows to man the tailors of the earth; comforting therein that when old robes are worn out there are members to make new" (1.2.154-157). There is always something new to gain after the death of another since worms, through decomposition, continue the life cycle and help new life form from the old just as in the case of the phoenix. Randall Martin suggests that the connection between worms and the eventual decomposition of Cleopatra's body allows worms to "transpose her body into the sustaining life of the Nile's food webs and Egypt's evolutionary becomings"

(157). By replenishing nutrients in the soil, worms are able to create life and help the Earth's natural cycles continue. For Martin, worms therefore help to construct the world instead of simply eating it. While I agree that Cleopatra focuses on the ability of worms to build a new world, I would argue that it is also important to consider the soul's potential escape from the world.

For Cleopatra, Antony's death marks the start of a new life for herself. After Antony's death, Cleopatra states that her "desolation does begin to make / A better life" (5.2.1-2). It is through Cleopatra's struggle that a new life may be formed. Cleopatra continually views death as a safe option, since earlier in the play she states: "if knife, drugs, serpents, have / Edge, sting, or operation. I am safe" (4.16.26-27). Dying offers Cleopatra safety as it marks the start of a new life. For Cleopatra, this new life extends beyond the mortal world as she frequently comments on rejoining Antony and desires to "spend that kiss / Which is [her] heaven to have" (5.2.297-298). The difference between physically dying and achieving salvation is that the death of the body creates safety for Cleopatra. Once she is dead, Caesar no longer has power over her. It is only when she starts to think about what she gains after she has died that the new life begins. Cleopatra must move beyond the state of being dead to reach salvation. Cleopatra is not simply focused on ending this life, but she also wants to start a new one. Since the worm is the weapon with which she has chosen to begin her journey it is "pretty," but, on a larger scale, her use of a worm is problematic.

Despite Cleopatra's goal of reaching eternal salvation, her goal is unattainable because of her connection to and use of the worm. Cleopatra's relationship with the worm is similar to Eve's relationship with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Ideally, both Cleopatra and Eve desire to obtain something new: escape or knowledge respectively. However, how

they obtain their goal causes irreversible harm. Ideally, Cleopatra hopes for a painless escape from the mortal world, going so far as to ask the Clown if he has a worm "that kills and pains not?" (5.2.239). Yet, shortly afterwards, when Iras dies from the worm's poisoned kiss, Cleopatra states: "If thou and nature can so gently part, / The stroke of death is a lover's pinch, / Which hurts, and is desired" (289-291). Ideally, Cleopatra wants her death to be painless, but in reality she notes that there is pain that is desirable. The reality of a painful death is also brought up by the Clown. In response to her question about the pain the worm causes, he recalls how a woman "died of the biting of it, [and] what pain she felt" (248-249). In this instance it is apparent that there is a tension occurring between the ideal and reality. In a similar way, Eve believes that she will gain knowledge by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, but she does not consider the consequences such an action will elicit. In the end, while Eve obtains new knowledge, she is also banished from the Garden of Eden, thereby becoming mortal, and is punished with painful childbirth and subservience to her husband (Gen. 3:16). While Eve achieves what she wants, it comes with several consequences. For both Cleopatra and Eve, their goal causes themselves harm.

The Clown in Cleopatra's death scene is especially important for the presentation of worms as he serves as a direct challenge to the idealistic death Cleopatra desires by being "privy to death's secrets" even if, as Cook suggests, it is unknowingly (263). The Clown tells Cleopatra "that the worm will do his kind" (5.2.257-258) and that "there is no / goodness in the worm" (261-262). In these lines, the Clown makes a connection between the worm and the serpent by commenting on the animal's personality. As discussed in Chapter One, serpents were perceived as having cunning and treacherous qualities. It was in the nature of these animals to be harmful and evil. The Clown suggests a similar representation for the

worm by telling Cleopatra that she should not trust it. There is something in its nature that makes it untrustworthy and, despite what Cleopatra may do, the worm will follow this nature. Despite the joy Cleopatra expects, the worm will still kill her and provide a death from which people "do seldom or never recover" (242-243). Cleopatra's hope to use the worm to achieve what she desires is similar to Eve's interaction with the serpent. Eve is able to obtain knowledge, her eventual goal, by way of the serpent's influence. Similarly, Cleopatra is able to achieve her goal of dying because of the worm. The problem for both Cleopatra and Eve is that their journey and connection with the worm or serpent proves to be destructive. The Clown comments how, despite women being a dish for the Gods, the devils inevitably end up corrupting half of them: "for in every ten that they [gods] make, the devils mar five" (271-272). Similarly, Eve, who was made by God, is corrupted by the serpent, an animal often associated with the Devil (*OED*, "serpent, n." 2). In this way the Clown comments on the finality of the action of death. Just as Eve ate the fruit, once Cleopatra lets the worm bite her, she cannot reverse her actions. In both of these instances, an objective is obtained at the cost of dying which includes all of the destruction and corruption that arises as a result of these deaths.

Finally, Cleopatra's use of the worm also challenges her description that her suicide remakes her into a Queen. Cleopatra describes her act as noble and approved by Antony from Heaven, but when Iras dies before her, Cleopatra exclaims:

> This proves me base.
> If she first meet the curlèd Antony
> He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
> Which is my heaven to have. (5.2.295-298)

Her lady's death by the same means equates the two and suggests that Iras could easily take Cleopatra's place. Cleopatra is therefore simply a placeholder and anyone could easily take her spot in the afterworld. Additionally, her desire to return to the past is echoed in her language. At the start of the play Cleopatra reveals that Antony would ask "Where's my serpent of old Nile?" (1.5.25) in reference to her. The wording is similar to Cleopatra's description of the asp as "the pretty worm / Of the Nilus" (5.2.238-239). Both Cleopatra and the worm are described in a similar way, suggesting a connection between them. She may be a Queen but she can just as easily be a worm acting under the manipulation of others. Cleopatra ensures the worm will bite her by applying it to herself rather than leaving the worm to be where it wants just as Caesar will not allow Cleopatra to behave in the way she desires. Altogether, for Cleopatra, the worm is a useful weapon. It serves a purpose for her and is therefore accepted and not feared. However, her perception of the future is challenged as certain characteristics of the worm highlight particular ambiguities. When those problems are highlighted the worm becomes something to be feared, just as it does according to the Clown's reservations. The discourse on the worm in *Antony and Cleopatra* is important as it shows how a person's biases influence their perception. By ignoring all of the challenges and problems the worm presents, Cleopatra is able to focus on its useful and good properties. It is only when others begin to note the contradictions associated with the worm that its façade begins to deteriorate.

In relation to body and soul, this revelation becomes problematic as it calls into question the type of salvation a person can achieve. Even if a person does not fear death and dies with just reason, they may not achieve the salvation they are hoping for. This dilemma surrounding salvation calls into question the significance of the reunion of body and soul.

William Perkins notes that during the Resurrection everyone will either be rewarded or punished for their actions: "The bodies of the wicked are the instruments of sinne, and the bodies of the righteous are the weapons of righteousnesse; and therefore their bodies must rise againe, that both in bodie and soule they may receive a reward, according to that which they have wrought in them" (qtd in Osmond 32). If Cleopatra will not receive the kiss that is rightfully hers, is there anything to achieve through the reunification of the body and soul?

Constance

My last presentation of worms, and a potential answer to the question raised by *Antony and Cleopatra*, comes from Constance in *King John*. After Constance believes her son Arthur has died, she confronts King Philip, Louis the Dauphin, and Cardinal Pandulph and states that all she wants to do is die and become one with death. Constance's description of death is distinctive to this chapter as, similar to Romeo, she describes death as a monster, but she wants to become that monster (3.4.33). While her description of death is similar to Cleopatra's, Constance differs from Cleopatra by not only seeking death but wishing to become deathly. Cleopatra uses death for her own gain and her death is simply one step in her hopeful journey. Constance, though, wants nothing more than death itself. Her focus on death is not only unique to this chapter but to the play as well. In *King John* death is described as having "cruel pangs" (5.4.59), as "hideous" (22), and as destroying people both physically and mentally:

> PRINCE HENRY. Death, having preyed upon the outward parts,
>
> Leaves them invincible, and his siege is now
>
> Against the mind; the which he pricks and wounds
>
> With many legions of strange fantasies…. (5.7.15-18)

Despite her desire to join death, Constance does not challenge the general presentation of death as horrifying and harmful. She describes it as an "odouriferous stench, [and] sound rottenness" (3.4.26) having "detestable bones" (29), and she notes how it prevents success: "Thou hate and terror to prosperity" (28). Despite this deplorable presentation, Constance still calls death "amiable" and "lovely." (25). She desires what others deem faulty. However, not only does Constance describe death with admiration, but she wants to become "a carrion monster like [death]" (33), and as part of her transformation she proclaims she will "ring these fingers with thy household worms" (31). Constance does not just want to be around worms but she wants to be entwined with them as part of her transformation into death. For Constance, worms are not a means for her to achieve an objective but rather, like Romeo, they are a marker of success. Her reference to worms in this way highlights another difference between Constance and Romeo or Cleopatra; death is not the start of a journey to a happier life but rather is the desired final destination.

Constance's presentation of death, and by extension her association with worms, is different from that of both Cleopatra and Romeo. Constance does not care about what comes after death as she focuses on the physical body rather that the soul. Romeo wants to be with Juliet and Cleopatra wants to start a new life away from Caesar. There is a goal for both of these characters that is achieved through their deaths. In contrast, Constance just wants to die. The difference between these relationships to death is caused by what is achievable through death. Death is the beginning of a journey for both Romeo and Cleopatra, and there is something they can gain through it. In contrast, Constance does not perceive any gain through death because the body can never escape corruption.

Constance's focus on the body is a result of her excessive grief over the death of her son Arthur. Through death Father Cardinal would suggest that Constance will be able to be reunited with her son in Heaven. However, while Constance does not challenge the idea of a meeting in Heaven, she laments that such a reunion will not allow her to regain all that she has lost:

> But now will canker-sorrow eat my bud,
> And chase the native beauty from his cheek;
> And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
> As dim and meagre as an agues' fit,
> And so he'll die; and rising so again,
> When I shall meet him in the court of heaven,
> I shall not know him; Therefore never, never
> Must I behold my pretty Arthur more. (3.4.82-89)

For Constance, even if she meets Arthur in Heaven, he will no longer be the same person he once was. Much like a worm that has destroyed a bud from inside out, death has corrupted and forever altered Arthur so that in Constance's view even rising to Heaven cannot save him. Following a broader tradition, Constance focuses on the physical changes that happen to a body through death: "Women's textual works of mourning, accordingly, tend to focus on the physical death of the beloved body, at the expense of Christian confidence in the resurrection of the soul" (Phillippy 12). As a result of Constance's attention to the body, the journey of salvation through death means nothing to her. Arthur will have been eaten and destroyed by worms and death until he is unrecognizable. He will be just as corrupted and altered by death when he reaches Heaven as his physical body was on Earth. Dying and

going to Heaven do not give Constance her son back; salvation means nothing to her since, in her understanding, death never leaves the body.

Yet, for Constance, if Heaven means little, living means even less. While alive Constance is surrounded by grief to the point that it influences her actions, causing her to untie her hair and contemplate suicide. Grief provides Constance some relief as it "fills the room up of my absent child…" (3.4.93); however she is only "sensible of grief" (53) and still remembers him. Constance's true goal is to forget her son in order to escape the memory and grief that consume her. In essence, by this point in the play, Constance has already begun to die since she enters the scene as "A grave unto a soul…" (17). In this instance, Constance is going against the contemporary idea that one must regulate their grief. As Ralph Houlbrooke describes, the amount one grieved had to be controlled: "Early modern England generally demanded a degree of control on the part of the individual, and the direction of powerful feelings into socially acceptable channels of mourning. Excessive grief was normally deprecated. To surrender to one's feelings showed a lack of faith, reason, self-control, even a perverse willfulness" (221). Since Constance has allowed her grief to fully consume her, she does not act as she should. Constance's grief follows part of a larger tradition where "women's mourning (frequently reflected in the period's literary and visual images) stresses the body's centrality to lamentation and the figurative merger of the (collective) body of mourning with the (individual) body of death" (Phillippy 15). Constance has become completely intertwined with her grief, causing her living body to prematurely gain deathly characteristics. The additional problem with Constance's grief is that it draws her farther away from God. Ideally, the death of a loved one could, in part, be a teachable moment that was supposed to draw a person closer to God:

> When he inflicted suffering upon those whom he loved, God did so either to punish them for their sins or to test their faith and patience. In either case he taught them that it was ultimately foolish to rely upon earthly satisfactions and human comforts. Bereavement was supposed to wean the hearts of Christians from the world and focus their aspirations more clearly upon the next life, where all the saved would be united in God. (Houlbrooke 222)

In Constance's case she is doing the opposite. Rather than separate herself from the world she holds tightly to it, so much so that she would rather stay on Earth with death than go to Heaven and be with God.

Part of the reason Constance cannot leave the world behind is because she will not let go of death. Since Constance is a combination of grave and soul, she has united death and soul together when the two should be apart. Constance, just like Heaven-bound Arthur, is a mixture of life and death by this point, and she is unwilling to let her grief and connection with death go. She may still be breathing but she is no longer living as she cannot escape the memory of her son. Both being alive on Earth and being alive in Heaven present unharmonious combinations of life and death, as in both states of living you can be entwined with death. The inability to separate life from death is problematic for Constance as she is unable to forget her son. While she may seem dead on Earth she still has her living memories, and even if she were to die and go to Heaven she would not be reunited with her son as he would still be marred and transformed by death. Failing all else, Constance only has one option left: being dead.

To stop at the place in between life and salvation allows Constance to relieve her grief and achieve "true redress" (3.4.24). In that space she does not have to endure valueless

compensation or live with the emotional grief she feels. Nor will she have to endure being reunited with an Arthur-less figure in Heaven. Rather, by becoming like death, Constance thinks she can 'live' in a place in between where she is able to escape all types of grief. Worms serve Constance as a means of signaling that she has achieved her goal through their association with death. Worms in *King John* are important as they demonstrate how their presentation is influenced by personal associations. Constance does not separate worms from death like Romeo, and she is not blind to their destructive qualities like Cleopatra. Instead Constance accepts both of these traits but, rather than reject them, she embraces them. She wants worms in all their worminess as in this instance those are their most useful qualities. It is not their nature that makes worms harmful but rather how they are viewed. Constance's presentation of worms is important for the connection between bodies and souls; it suggests that the two do not have to separate at the time of death for a person to achieve the salvation they are looking for. Since, as represented by Arthur's corrupted body, the body can never escape the corruption of death, there is no need for reunification to happen. In essence the body is never able to become pure and will forever remain corrupted.

Conclusion

As has been discussed in the previous chapters, during the Early Modern Period worms were not generally viewed positively. Instead they were usually viewed as corrupting negative creatures that harmed or lowered those with whom they came into contact with. However, as demonstrated in this chapter, worms were not always despised as each circumstance and desired outcome influences the presentation of worms. Romeo's desire is to escape Verona and be reunited with Juliet: the soul of his world. Romeo's focus on Juliet and the circumstances surrounding her death causes Romeo to perceive death and a life with

worms positively. Unaware that Juliet is actually still alive, Romeo believes that she has been untouched by death and her body has been spared from the corruption and destruction that death normally causes. A life with death and living with worms is not something that needs to be feared and avoided because of Juliet's presence.

Cleopatra's death and usage of the worm is similar to Eve's interactions with the Serpent and the Fall of Humanity. While Caesar congratulates Cleopatra for her death and acknowledges that her suicide helped her to best him, her scene with the worm and the Clown highlights ideas of original sin. Cleopatra ignores the destructive qualities of the worm and death in a similar way to how Eve ignored God's warning about eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Additionally, just as the Fall introduced mortality, Cleopatra cannot achieve the new life she wants since the action that is required, having the worm bite her, will cause destruction and corruption through the introduction of death.

Finally, Constance does not want to traverse through death to a new life; instead, she desires to live with death in order to escape the inescapable combination of death and life that she finds on Earth and in Heaven. Rather than focusing on spiritual rejuvenation like Romeo and Cleopatra, Constance focuses on the physical degradation caused by death. Constance's focus is influenced by the excessive grief she feels over the supposed death of her son Arthur. While she is alive, Constance cannot escape the memory of her son, and she does not believe that the Arthur she will meet in Heaven will be the same as the one she knew on Earth. In order to escape the degraded memory of Arthur, Constance focuses on staying with death where she will be free from the grief she is experiencing but will also not have to endure a reunion with her corrupted son in Heaven.

Overall, Romeo's, Cleopatra's, and Constance's associations and presentations of worms demonstrate how worms are shown to be useful when they help characters escape the torments of the living world. However, the destruction and corruption associated with worms and death challenge the importance of the reunification of body and soul in order for a person to achieve salvation. This presentation of worms is vital as it shapes these character's connection between their bodies and souls. Both Romeo and Constance achieve or perceive a better life without the traditional reunification of body and soul after death, as they can both imagine a form of salvation without transcendence. While presenting a more traditional view of finding a new life through death, Cleopatra's relationship with worms challenges the idea that she will achieve the salvation that she has conceived. Overall, worms challenge the importance of the reconnection of body and soul in order for transcendence to occur. For these three characters, there is life in death.

Conclusion

That's the End?

In this thesis I have explored several different representations of worms in Shakespeare's canon. As discussed in Chapter One, one of the largest associations is between worms and death. Worms are an inevitable aspect of death as they will be the eventual inheritors of a person's physical body. Worms serve as the ultimate leveler as no one, regardless of wealth or social standing, is able to escape being eaten by them. Such a fate and interconnection is often presented with fear since worms consume and remove someone's individuality. Additionally, worms may serve as a representation for the interruption of human inheritance as worms consume the physical body which is the only thing that humans may truly leave behind after they die. Worms demonstrate the destructive aspects of death, and the presence of worms in relation to the body proves to disrupt metaphysical assumptions of society.

In Chapter Two, I focused on the importance of the association between worms and ideas of putrefaction and corruption. In the Early Modern Period, worms were thought to arise from many different types of matter, but overall worms need a putrid environment in order to thrive. Such an environment may come from a dead rotting corpse, but it can also come from a living sinning soul. Just as worms eat and decompose the physical body, worms of conscience gnaw at a person from the inside. In this instance, worms act as a reminder of sin and the Fall of humanity from Eden. Just as the Fall introduces humanity's mortality, worms serve as a reminder of the destruction that befalls all sinners. While the worm of conscience gnaws on the sinner's soul, its primary aim is to remind the sinner to repent and

save themselves from the torment of Hell. As well, worms are not limited to saving individuals and can also begin to breed from putrid societies that need to be purified.

Finally, in Chapter Three I changed focus from negative to positive in order to highlight the association between worms and ideas of rebirth. Through death, worms can mark the start of a new life for someone. This new life can be represented as an afterlife or it can represent an escape from aspects of the physical world. In both instances, death and becoming connected with worms are vital as worms serve as the gatekeeper between the living and their intended goal in or through death. The invocation of worms in these moments of rebirth can be problematic as it challenges the need for a complete reunification of the physical body and spiritual soul in order for transcendence to occur. As demonstrated by Romeo and Constance, in particular instances, staying with worms and death can represent the start of a new life. Additionally, for Cleopatra, like the serpent in Genesis, worms may provide an avenue to something new; however, the involvement of the worm inevitably brings corruption too. Despite being perceived as useful, the presence of worms challenges the idea of achievable transcendence by way of the reunification of body and soul.

Overall, from this analysis I have examined the relationship between worms and people and perspectives and how representations change depending on the 'use' of the worms. Largely, worms are corrupting figures that damage and disrupt people and the metaphysical order of the world. However, their ability to rejuvenate and bring life and hope to the world should not be ignored. Worms in Shakespeare are therefore useful figures to study the state of the world whether it is corrupt and falling apart or whether metaphysical processes are functioning as they should.

This research highlights the benefit of studying worms across plays rather than simply focusing on one particular work. In this way we are able to compare and contrast various contexts in order to help highlight the multifaceted depictions of worms. Additionally, we are able to expand the implication of the representation of worms as figurative symbols beyond the context of one or two works. Worms are able to move out of the play and into the world.

While this thesis marks a longer analysis of Shakespeare's worms, it is by no means the end of such research. As mentioned in the introduction, this research expands scholarship to a number of plays and sonnets whose references to worms have not been previously studied, but still others have been left untouched. Each of the other worm lines and connotations are worthy topics of further analysis. In order to assist with further scholarship, I have included two tables, one for plays and one for poetry, in the appendix to this thesis listing and organizing all of the worm lines, both those discussed and not, into appropriate connotations. For my purposes I have organized the lines into the following categories: 'Civil Dissention,' 'Comparison,' 'Corruption,' 'Death/Dying,' 'Insult,' 'Leveling,' 'Respect for Lower Beings,' 'Usability,' and 'Worm Food.' I am by no means suggesting that the connotation or connotations I have listed for each line are the absolute answers nor am I suggesting that these are the only appropriate categories. Rather, the suggested organization serves a starting to point to see some of the ideas and concepts related to worms in the Early Modern Period. As with any research, new perspectives and knowledge constantly allow us to see things in new ways and help us to expand our own understanding.

Potential areas for further research include ideas of respect expressed in *Pericles* or the idea of being called a worm as an endearment as in *The Tempest* rather than just as an insult. By exploring such topics we can move away from an understanding of worms solely

as bodies of corruption and destruction. Additionally, both of Shakespeare's longer narrative poems include worm lines worth investigating. In "Venus and Adonis," Venus refers to death as "earth's worm" (933). The implication of not just having death and worms be associated with one another but to have death itself become a worm is worth further analysis. What changes when death becomes a worm? How do the ideas associated with worms change the presentation of death? Additionally, "The Rape of Lucrece" offers an opportunity to study worms in relation to ideas of gender. In the poem, the narrator suggests worms of conscience are easier to see in women than in men:

> Their smoothness, like a goodly champaign plain,
> Lays open all the little worms that creep;
> In men, as in a rough-grown grove, remain
> Cave-keeping evils that obscurely sleep. (1247-1250)

Through ideas expressed in Chapter Two, it would be possible to explore the implications of seeing or not seeing the worm of conscience in men. What happens when we do see representations of worms in men?

This thesis aims to show the importance of considering animals, no matter how big or small, that often go unconsidered. Like the worms beneath our feet, Shakespeare has many animals creeping, slithering, and waddling through his works. These animals are not only worthy of study on a small scale but also are worthy of larger studies that combine many facets of the conception together. By continuing to expand the roster of animals we study in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we can continue to explore how Early Modern-era humans view and create themselves and the metaphysical world.

Notes

1. See Raber, "Shakespeare and Animal Studies" for a general overview of Animal Studies to 2015.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all citations for Shakespeare's works are from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Words* 2nd ed. edited by Wells and Taylor.

3. An obsolete definition of pooped is "To fool, deceive, cheat, cozen; (also) to overcome" (*OED* "poop, v.2").

4. In these lines Shakespeare is not limiting Hermia to simply talking about Lysander's death but is also insulting Demetrius by suggesting that his supposed action of murder makes him no better than worm. The invocation of worms to insult characters is not unique to *MND* and the concept of insults will be discussed in Chapter Two.

5. Topsel's discussion about the various ways people interact with worms will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

6. "It is the trappings of death that scare us more than death itself" (Bacon 719).

7. See Oosterjwik for a more detailed discussion about verminous cadaver effigies and their representation in relation to corruption and mortality and about the similarities and differences between verminous iconography in Britain and others parts of Europe.

8. Originally, death was represented as cadaver but by roughly the mid-16th century death was presented as a skeleton. Throughout the periods skulls were used as another representation for death (Neill 66).

9. For images of The Three Living and Three Dead at Peakirk, see Rouse Image A on Plate XXXVII and Images A and B on Plate XXXVIII.

10. For image, see Engel p. 73.

11. For image, see Neill p. 7.

12. For a general overview of historical interpretations of Genesis see Kvan and Schearing, *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*.

13. See "Chap. XXXIII Of the figns and cure of Worms out of *Gabucinus*" pp. 1111-1122.

14. For examples relating to people see pp. 132, 259, 443, 452, and 689. For examples relating to animals see pp. 89, 127, 182, 690, and 692.

15. All citations for *Romeo and Juliet* in this section are from *The Oxford Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Jill Levenson.

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Appendix

Table 1

Worm References in Shakespeare's Plays

Connotations	**Male/Female; High/Low**	**Citation**	**Character**	**Line(s)**
Civil Dissention	MH	*3H6* 2.2.17	Clifford	The smallest worm will turn, being trodden on…
Civil Dissension; Corruption	MH	*1H6* 3.1.73-74	King Henry VI	… Civil dissension is a viperous worm / That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth.
Civil Dissention; Corruption	MH	*Mac.* 3.4.28-29	Macbeth	There the grown serpent lies. The worm that's fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed…
Comparison	MH	*Rom.* 1.4.66	Mercutio	…Not half so big as a round little worm…
Comparison	MH	*Per.* 7.42-43	Pericles	…Where now his son's a glow-worm in the night, / The which hath fire darkness, none in light…
Comparison	ML	*Cym.* 3.4.32-35	Pisanio	What shall I need to draw my sword? The paper / Hath cut her throat already. No, 'tis slander, / Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue / Outvenoms all the worms of Nile…
Corruption	FH	*AYL* 3.4.22-23	Celia	… I do think him as concave as a covered goblet, or a worm-eaten nut
Corruption	FH	*R3* 1.3.219	Queen Margaret	The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul.
Corruption	FH	*TN* 2.4.111-112	Viola	…But let concealment, like a worm i'th' bud, / Feed on her damask cheek: …

Corruption	MH	*H5* 2.4.85-86	Exeter	…'Tis no sinister nor no awkward claim, / Picked from the worm-holes of long-vanished days…
Corruption	MH	*Ado* 3.3.131-133	Borachio	… sometime like the shaven Hercules in the smirched worm-eaten tapestry, where his codpiece seems as massy as his club?
Corruption	MH	*Rom.* 1.1.146-152	Montague	But to himself so secret and so close, / So far from sounding and discovery, / As is the bud bit with an envious worm / Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air / Or dedicate his beauty to the sun. / Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow / We would as willingly give cure as know.
Corruption	MH	*TMP.* 3.1.31	Prospero	…Poor worm, thou art infected!
Corruption	MH	*Tim.* 4.3.179-184	Timon	…Whose womb unmeasurable, and infinite breast / Teems and feeds all, whose self-same mettle / Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man, is puffed / Engenders the black toad and adder blue, / The gilded newt and eyeless venomed worm, / With all the abhorrèd births below crisp heaven…
Corruption	n/a	*2H4* Introduction 35	Rumour	…And this worm-eaten hold of raggèd stone…

Corruption; Death / Dying	MH	*MV* 2.7.65-69	Morocco	'All that glisters is not gold; / Often have you heard that told. / Many a man his life hath sold / But my outside to behold. /Gilded tombs do worms infold.
Corruption; Death / Dying	ML	*Ant.* 5.2.260-262	Clown	Look you, the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people; for indeed there is no goodness in the worm.
Corruption; Worm Food	MH	*Ham.* 4.3.20-21	Hamlet	Not where he eats, but where a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him.
Death/Dying	L	*MND* 2.2.20-23	Fairies	Weaving spiders, come not here; / Hence, you long-legg'd spinners, hence; / Beetles black, approach not near; / Worm nor snail do no offence.
Death/Dying	L	*MND* 2.2.11-12	Fairies	…Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong; / Come not near our Fairy Queen.
Death/Dying	FH	*MND* 3.2.70-71	Hermia	…And hast thou kill'd him sleeping? O brave touch! / Could not a worm, an adder, do so much?
Death/Dying	F	*Mac.* 4.1.16	Second Witch	…Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting…
Death/Dying	MH	*MM* 3.1.16-17	Duke Vincentio	…For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork / Of a poor worm ….
Death/Dying	MH	*2H6* 3.2.264-265	Salisbury	… Lest, being suffered in that harmful slumber, / The mortal worm might make the sleep eternal.
Death/Dying	ML	*Ant.* 5.2.252-253	Clown	…the worm's an odd worm.

Death/Dying	FH	*Ant.* 5.2.238-239	Cleopatra	... Hast thou the pretty worm / Of Nilus there, that kills and pains not?
Death/Dying	ML	*Ant.* 5.2.247-249	Clown	… how she died of the biting of it, what pain she felt. Truly, she makes a very good report o' th' worm ...
Death/Dying	MH	*Ado* 3.2.25	Leonato	Where is but a humour or a worm.
Death/Dying	ML	*Ant.* 5.2.255	Clown	I wish you all joy of the worm.
Death/Dying	ML	*Ant.* 5.2.274	Clown	Yes, forsooth. I wish you joy o' th' worm.
Death/Dying	ML	*Ant.* 5.2.257-258	Clown	You must think this, look you, that the worm will do his kind.
Death/Dying; Worm Food	ML	*MND* 3.2.383-385	Robin	… damnèd spirits all / That in cross-ways and floods have burial / Already to their wormy beds are gone…
Death/Dying; Worm Food	FH	*Jn.* 3.4.25;31	Constance	…Death, Death; O amiable lovely Death! … And ring these fingers with thy household worms…
Death/Dying; Worm Food	MH	*Rom.* 5.3.107-109	Romeo	…And never from this pallet of dim night / Depart again. Here, here will I remain / With worms that are thy chamber-maids….
Insult	FH	*Shr. 5.2.174*	Katharina	Come, come, you forward and unable worms…
Insult	MH	*LLL 4.3.151-152*	Biron	Good heart, what grace hast thou thus to reprove / These worms for loving, that art most in love?

Insult	MH	*Ado.* 5.2.74-78	Benedick	Question - why, an hour in clamour and a quarter in rheum. Therefore is it most expedient for the wise, if Don Worm - his conscience - find no impediment to the contrary, to be the trumpet of his own virtues, as I am to myself.
Insult	ML	*AYL* 3.2.63-64	Touchstone	Most shallow, man. Thou worms' meat in respect of a good piece of flesh indeed …
Insult	ML	*1H4* 2.1.73-75	Gadshill	… I am joined with no foot-landrakers, no long-staff sixpenny strikers, none of these mad mustachio purple-hued malt-worms; …
Insult	ML	*2H4* 2.4.336-340	Sir John	The fiend hath pricked down Bardolph irrecoverable, and his face is Lucifer's privy-kitchen, where he doth nothing but roast malt-worms. For the boy, there is a good angel about him, but the devil outbids him, too
Insult	Unknown	*Wiv.5.5.82*	[Hobgoblin]	Vile worm, thou wast o'erlook'd even in thy birth.
Leveling	FH	*H8* 4.2.126-128	Katharine	So may he ever do, and ever flourish / When I shall dwell with worms, and my poor name / Banished the kingdom. …

Leveling	FH	*Mac.* 4.2.30-32	Lady Macduff	LADY MACDUFF: ... …Sirrah, your father's dead, / And what will you do now? How will you live? / MACDUFF'S SON: As birds do, mother. LADY MACDUFF: What, with worms and flies?
Leveling	MH	*Ham.* 4.3.27-28	Hamlet	A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.
Levelling	MH	*Ham.* 5.1.86-90	Hamlet	Why, e'en so, and now my Lady Worm's, chapless, and knocked about the mazzard with a sexton's spade. Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding, but to / play at loggats with 'em? Mine ache to think on't.
Levelling	MH	*Ham.* 4.3.21-25	Hamlet	Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service - two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.
Leveling; Worm Food	MH	*Lr.*F. 4.1.34-38; Lr.Q.15.32-36	Gloucester	Which made me think a man a worm. My son / Came then into my mind, and yet my mind / Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more since. / As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods; / They kill us for their sport....

Levelling; Worm Food	MH	*R2 3.2.*141; 145-146	King Richard II	Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs, / …. And yet not so, for what can we bequeath / Save our deposèd bodies to the ground?
Respect for Lower Beings	FH	*Per.* 15.128-129	Marina	I trod once on a worm against my will, / But I wept for it….
Respect for Lower Beings	MH	*Per.* 1.143-145	Pericles	…The blind mole casts / Copped hills towards heav'n to tell the earth is thronged / By man's oppression, and the poor worm doth die for't.
Usability	FH	*MND* 3.1.161-162	Titania	…And for night tapers crop their waxen thighs / And light them at the fiery glow-worms' eyes…
Usability	MH	*Lr.* F.3.4.97-98 ; Lr. Q.11.94-95	King Lear	... Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk…
Usability	MH	*Oth.* 3.4.73-75	Othello	The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk, /And it was dyed in mummy, which the skillful / Conserved of maidens' hearts….
Usability	MH	*Wiv.* 5.5.77-78	Sir Hugh Evans	…And twenty glow-worms shall our lanterns be / To guide our measure round about the tree…
Usability	MH	*Ham.* 1.5.89-90	Ghost	The glow-worm shows the matin to be near, / And gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
Worm Food	FH	*AYL* 4.1.99-101	Rosalind	… But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

Worm Food	FH	*R3* 4.4.316-317	Queen Elizabeth	…Which now - two tender bedfellows to dust - / Thy broken faith hath made the prey for worms.
Worm Food	MH	*Cym.* 4.2.216-219	Guiderius	…Why, he but sleeps. / If he be gone he'll make his grave a bed. / With female fairies will his tomb be haunted, / *(To Innogen)* And worms will not come to thee.
Worm Food	MH	*1H4* 5.4.84-88	Prince Henry	HOTSPUR: … O, I could prophesy, / But that the earthy and cold hand of death / Lies on my tongue. No, Percy, thou art dust, / And food for— PRINCE HAL: For worms, brave Percy. Fare thee well, great heart.
Worm Food	MH	*2H4* 4.3.244-245	King Henry IV	Only compound me with forgotten dust. / Give that which gave thee life unto the worms.
Worm Food	MH	*Rom.* 3.1.107	Mercutio	They have made worms' meat of me.
Worm Food	ML	*Per.* 16.22-23	Boult	Ay, she quickly pooped him, she made him roast meat for worms….

Table 2

Worm References in Shakespeare's Poetry

Category	Citation	Line(s)
Comparison	*Ven*. 621	His eyes, like glow-worms, shine when he doth fret …
Corruption	*Luc.* 848	'Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud…
Corruption	*Luc.* 946-948	[Times glory] …'To fill with worm-holes stately monuments, / To feed oblivion with decay of things, / To blot old books and alter their contents, ….
Corruption	*Luc.* 1247-1248	Their smoothness, like a goodly champaign plan / Lays open all the little worms that creep …
Corruption; Death/Dying	*Ven.* 931-936	'Hard-favoured tyrant, ugly, meagre, lean, / Hateful divorce of love,' --thus chides she Death; / 'Grim-grinning ghost, earth's worm: what dost thou mean / To stifle beauty, and to steal his breath / Who when he lived, his breath and beauty set / Gloss on the rose, smell to the violet?
Worm Food	*Son*. 6 13-14	Be not self-will'd, for thou art much too fair / To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.
Worm Food	*Son*. 71 1-4	No longer mourn for me when I am dead / Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell / Give warning to the world that I am fled / From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.
Worm Food	*Son*. 74 9-12	So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life, / The prey of worms, my body being dead, / The coward conquest of wretch's knife, / Too base of thee to be rememberèd.
Worm Food	*Son*. 146 7-8	Shall worms, inheritors of this excess, / Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?